

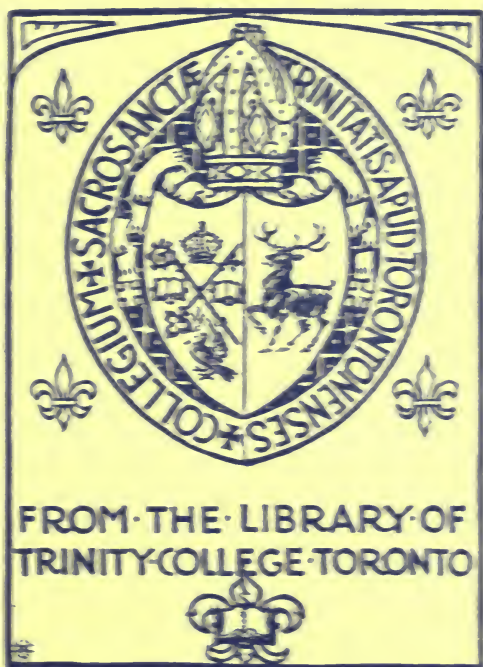
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GOD'S CITY

AND

THE COMING OF THE KINGDOM



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GOD'S CITY

AND

THE COMING OF THE KINGDOM

BY THE REV.

HENRY SCOTT HOLLAND, M.A.

CANON AND PRECENTOR OF ST. PAUL'S CATHEDRAL

NEW AND CHEAPER EDITION

LONGMANS, GREEN, & CO.

LONDON, NEW YORK, AND BOMBAY

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TO
THE BISHOP OF ST. ASAPH
AND THE CLERGY OF HIS DIOCESE
IN GRATEFUL MEMORY
OF INTERCOURSE MADE HAPPY TO ME
BY THE UNSTINTED GENEROSITY
OF THEIR MOST COURTEOUS AND KINDLY WELCOME.



PREFACE

THE Church of God — everything conspires to make this the immediate subject round which all religious discussions turn, and towards which all the profoundest spiritual interests are set. Socially, we are compelled to demand a corporate Christian society. Individualistic forms of belief have become impossible. Intellectually and dogmatically, it has become increasingly clear that in the fact of the Incarnation lies the secret of Christ. And, when once the attention is concentrated on the Incarnation, the old argument, so excellently rehearsed by F. D. Maurice in "The Kingdom of Christ," begins to bite home. If the union of God and man, achieved as a fact, be the one,

real, and universal ground of our true and redeemed humanity, then there must exist a universal Society in which this union can be practically realized.

It must be so. Every day it becomes less and less possible for any one to doubt it. The Faith constitutes a kingdom. The inward and the outward respond and correspond. The Creed can only be actualized in, and with, and through a Divine Society, a Church. This is the growing conviction. And I have tried, in the four lectures given at St. Asaph, to show how deep are the moral and spiritual grounds in our innermost being and character on which this conviction rests.

I have done nothing, in this volume, to make it clear how entirely the Scripture Records tally with this conviction. It seems to me absolutely certain that they never conceive of the Christian Faith as existing in any other form than that of an organized Society. The Gospels make it

our Lord's central and dominating work, to select and prepare this living body in which belief in Him should be lodged. All other interests were subordinate to this.

The very first act that the Apostles attempted when He left them, was to complete their fabric of organization which He had formed. They organized from the very start, with deliberate determination. It was no afterthought ; it was part and parcel of the earliest gospel preached.

Organization is found in the very heart of all St. Paul's Epistles ; and as he draws towards his end, it occupies nearly the whole of his thought and writing.

But it is needless to insist on this. If any one wishes to see the scriptural case for an essential Church put in a form that seems to me singularly forcible, I would ask them to read Hammond's short tract, "What does the Bible say about the Church ?"

But, granted that the Faith exists in the form of a kingdom, it still remains

true that the growth of this kingdom is as the growth of a living thing. It will not, therefore, be stiff, formal, or mechanical, but will display infinite pliability and variation and diversity in its modes of advance, in its efforts at survival, while still it preserves its organic type. It is this characteristic which is illustrated, as I have tried to show, by our Lord's parables on the kingdom.

And then, lastly, we have in the Acts of the Apostles the actual record of the ways in which the growth of the kingdom did, as a fact, make its start. We read, in this book, how the reality corresponded to what our Lord had foretold—how this Kingdom of Heaven, this Church of the living God, did illustrate all that varied elasticity, in its mixed and broken advance, which the parables had attributed to it. We have, surely, in the Acts, just what is required to correct any too hasty conclusions as to the even regularity and the sharp precision of outline which we might

anticipate in an organized kingdom. Could any career be more unexpected than this one recorded? If we are tempted to suppose that a right conception of the Church will enable us to foretell how it will work, we are pulled up short by the story of the Apostles' acts. There is a Church; there is an organic Body of the faithful; and yet that does not render impossible the risks, the confusions, the uncertainties, the obscurities, the troubles, here recorded—recorded that “we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope” for ourselves. It is a kingdom that comes. The life of grace involves, essentially, a Society. But its “coming,” its arrival, its realization, may be “through much tribulation;” it may work out through perplexity and disorder.

There will, therefore, be two fatal blunders open to us: one, to deny the existence or the possibility of disorder in the kingdom; the other, to accept disorder as the tolerated, justifiable condition.

Our plain duty is to cling fast to all the elements of union which are still ours; to pray ardently for the fuller realization of that union which is the incessant demand of the kingdom within us; and to hope on stubbornly in the power and mercy of Him Who is Himself the Unity of His kingdom.

I feel, sadly, how rough the style of these sermons remains. It is often quite informal and colloquial. But I still suppose it best to leave them as they were preached. They may gain in simple directness what they lose in form.

HENRY SCOTT HOLLAND.

I, AMEN COURT, ST. PAUL'S,

January, 1894.

NOTE.—The four Lectures given in the Cathedral of St. Asaph were addressed to the Bishop and Clergy of that Diocese, who, by the liberality of the Dean, are enabled to meet together, annually, for spiritual intercourse.

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THE CITY OF GOD.

I.

THE INVISIBLE CITY.

“But ye are come unto Mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and Church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel.”—
HEB. xii. 22-24.

REVEREND FATHER IN GOD, BRETHREN OF
THE CLERGY,

Not without dignity, surely, nor yet without something of inward relief, are we met to-day, at a time when your deepest anxieties and your most troubled debates are, of necessity, occupied with the outward position and legalized authority and incidental temporalities of your historic Church in Wales, to turn aside and enclose ourselves within the quiet peace of this venerable House of God, that

we may meditate together on that moral and spiritual wealth which lies stored up for us, free from the perils of time or change, safe from the threats of attack, in the phrase so dear to our souls and hearts, "I believe in the Holy Catholic Church."

"The Catholic Church!" Ah! the bitter memories, the angry rumours, the acid quarrels, that the sound of that name evokes! The moment it is uttered, men prepare themselves for the old melancholy fight; the jangling cries of the rival hosts begin to gather in the air; each is feeling for his familiar weapon; the stakes are set; the trumpets summon to the onset. Do what we will, though we intend nothing but peace, though we desire only to open our souls in confidence to each other on a matter that goes so deep into our life, yet the mention of the "Church" stirs still a world of suspicion, of argument, of jarring theories, of painful tangle, of wearisome war. Though we do it in the very innocence of our hearts, yet as soon as we "speak unto them thereof, they make them ready to battle."

The Church!—"the Holy Catholic Church!" How wretched and how strange it is, that

this name, which should by rights lift our whole manhood as with the glow and glory of sunshine—this name which should have in it the majestic inspiration of that high citizenship which flows down to us from the Jerusalem which is above, that dear and holy city which is the mother of us all, whose very life is freedom—this name which should speak to us as with the tenderness of a mother, as with the large, wide, honourable gladness of a home—this name which should be the herald of all that enlarges the reason, and fertilizes the imagination, and kindles hopes, and widens brotherhood, and dignifies flesh and blood, and enriches human destiny, and glorifies our common earth, and opens a door in heaven,—should, nevertheless, have been so damaged and thwarted by our sins that it chills men's hearts, as it falls upon their ears, with a sense of something narrow, and hard, and warped, and pedantic, and aggravating, and repellent, and pinched, and cruel! As they hear it, they have learned to expect a harsh assertion of uncomfortable and disputable rights, or of cramping necessities, or of stiff external forms and grooves, or of fretful limitations, and unreasonable legalities, and narrow-minded

formulas. That is what the word conveys to them. It is a symbol of divisions that appear to be altogether needless, and of external distinctions which are utterly outside the inward and vital essence of religious belief. Even when convinced of its practical necessity and justification, most laymen still fret and fume at the recurrence of the unhappy title, and are uneasy while it is to the fore, and are glad when the clergyman in the pulpit says as little about it as he can.

Now, why has this come about? Why have we suffered it to happen? Why has the word lost its ancient power? Why has it been robbed of its honour? How "has the fine gold become dim"?

My brethren, these are solemn questions for us to face. And our first duty, in facing them, must lie in rehearsing, if we may, the primal idea of the spiritual Church, in its integrity and its purity, that we may see clearly wherein its true glory consists. And this rehearsal will, of necessity, involve our going back behind all the outer framework which this motive-idea of the Church may have built for itself, by slow experience and gradual effort, out of the material that has come into its hand in the course of

its long stay in this country or in that. It is this laborious process which we sum up for ourselves in what we call the Establishment and Endowment of the National Church. These terms embody the historical growth by which the Church has woven itself into the life and manners of the nation; and we shall never understand the nature of this process, unless we have, first, detached our radical and formative conception of what the Church ideally is, in order that we may consider it in its unencumbered verity, free from all that blurs its outlines.

But do not let us suppose that, in so detaching it, we are condemning this separable after-growth. Far from it! On the contrary, I cannot but think that, if the true formative ideal of the spiritual Church were once conceded, the process of Establishment would become at once obvious, intelligible, natural, justifiable. It would follow that such an ideal, appealing as it does to the deep bonds that underlie and knit together human society, would instinctively mingle at every point with the order and system of that society. It would fuse with it as with a kindred nature. It would interweave manifold and congenial relationships with it. It would touch it here, and there, and everywhere.

It would be always tending to correlate, in ever-closer intimacy, the life of the citizen and the life of the Churchman. Given the living conception of the Church as a Divine society, crowning man's natural fellowship in a human state; and all the results which are historically so familiar to us in England, will seem natural. The Church will lay hands upon the whole country in its length and breadth, upon its entire scenery. It will measure out all the ground in a network of parishes. It will attempt to verify its own catholicity, its own outward unity, by covering the entire area; by assuming that all born and baptized within that area are its proper members, and are moving forward, by a natural process, towards Confirmation, and the full privileges of Communion. It must work on this assumption just because it never can think of itself as a Christian *sect*. That is impossible to it, by its very nature. It is bound to tend towards a condition in which it will be co-extensive with the local and national Christianity. It is bound to live as if all Christian faith must be on the road towards its realization in a Church. So it will take the practical action which follows from such primary assumption. It will aim at

fitting each parish with a building adequate to this ideal; a building that will fitly realize the spiritual significance of the Body which it represents, and which will, therefore, be baptized with its own full title, "the Church;" a building which suggests that it is raised for the good and the use of all who will ever worship God through Jesus Christ in that parish during all the years to come; a church, therefore, that will be central, dominant, massive, enduring; a church ready to brave wind and rain and cold and heat, and yet to abide the same, in type, and in order, and in habit, and in practice; while still, on and on, the sequent generations come and pass, and find their brief passage hallowed by some touch of Divine dignity, as all are brought to be baptized by the same rite in the one Font, and bow under the same authoritative blessing of Apostolic Hands to receive the full endowment of the Holy Ghost, and take and eat of the one Bread, from the one Altar, at the sound of the same words from the lips of the Priest, who will, for ever, be found there, at the one spot in the same Sanctuary, lifting the gifts in Holy Hands, evoking the present energy of the Eternal

Sacrifice, giving of that which is Meat indeed and Drink indeed. Such a building as this, and such a parochial system, the idea of the Catholic Church, working within the body of believers, is certain to produce, and always has produced.

And, then, moreover, round and about such an enduring structure as this, designed with a view to its completion and its permanence, there must inevitably grow a mass of legal and social custom, based on the instinctive pre-supposition that this Church is a normal and native inhabitant, occupying the Christian land. There it will always be; and there must, therefore, be rights attached to it, and duties towards it; and these rights and duties must be capable of definition in case of dispute, and of transference as office-holders die and a new generation rises to take occupation of the ancient floor and hereditary usages. So, merely in order to secure this lasting transference handed down from father to children, the law will have woven its web, and there will be a system of patronage, and of endowment, and of clerical privilege. And what the law has devised, the State will have authorized, or enforced. And so what we call

an Establishment will have grown into existence, with its concomitant accumulation of habits and of possessions, capable of endless variation according to the accidents of its historical position, but yet in itself, in some form or another, perfectly natural, and all but inevitable, if once men have acquired the conception, not of a Sect in which they have banded themselves together, by their own choice, for the better furtherance of a certain view of Christian truth which they hold as against others, but of an Institution that was intended to be co-terminous with the Christian life, essential to the natural development of that life, enduring, in its structural permanence, as long as that life itself endures.

But it is just this presupposition which is necessary to explain the entire outward fabric, legal, customary, solid, which it has brought into existence. And we cannot be the least surprised that, with this inner basis gone, all this external system seems a monstrous and unintelligible mass of presumptuous inequalities, encumbering the ground with the ruins of a dead past, audaciously venturing to anticipate an unknown future. Instead of interpreting itself as the spontaneous outcome of a native

and central idea, it appears to the mind of the individualist, for whom all Church order is accidental, unessential, sectarian, as a worldly incrustation, obscuring and fettering the free movements of the spirit.

Therefore it is that, to interpret ourselves to such opponents, we must go behind all this social and legal deposit accumulated by an historical Church, if we would arrive at that which alone can explain or justify the accumulation. For that which makes it congenial to a Church to adopt this temporal position, or to raise this material structure, lies deep down in the innermost conception formed of what a Church vitally is. If it were what the opponents of its public status assume, it would, no doubt, never have taken this external form which so repels them. Take, for instance, one of our typical old parish churches! What a world of thought it embodies! String-course and beam, tower and choir, all are alive with immemorial voices. The very stones cry out their story. They speak of a Catholic unity, which cannot frame for itself a house without reproducing a common tradition that stretches far and wide, and has roots in the deep soil of human history. Each such church has a place

in that long architectural experience which the body at large has slowly accumulated. Far away in tiny villages, buried in wooded hollows, the lines and angles of buttress and roof share in the universal heritage, and connect the remote corner of the Christian life with the wonder of ancient and magnificent cathedrals, the central hearths of the vast Home of God. Each repeats, in the infinite variety of local detail, the systematic plan of the sanctuary, the universal type—"the pattern seen in the mount." It stands there as a protest against isolation. It is an instance of a law, a moment in a style. It is possessed of a pedigree. It hands on a tradition. It gathers to itself agelong associations. It is a creation—a living thing. It reveals the workings of an inner spirit. Such a building cannot be produced to order; it cannot be bought or sold; it cannot be invented. It is not arrived at by a poetical sense of what would be impressive or expedient. It has not been devised as a wholesome and appropriate and picturesque object-lesson. Rather, it emerges as the inevitable expression of a certain form of Christian belief—the belief in a spiritual reality, called the Church. And no Christian body of believers that has not had this inner

conception of the Church has ever succeeded in erecting a fabric of this type. Without it, men build halls or meeting-houses, but never anything that would convey the impression of a Church. You must believe in a Church in order to be able to build one.

Behind, then, the outer shell—behind into the spiritual motives—we must search, if we would disclose to ourselves the secret of those public forms and fashions which a Church adopts. Yes, and behind not merely the outer status, but behind, also, its own structural articulation—behind its own essential Orders.

That which we have hitherto spoken of—its legal, social, material, historical setting—may be compared to the clothes that it wears; but, in the Orders and the Sacraments, we arrive at the body itself. Yet it is no use attempting to understand the body, without going behind the body to the animating soul—the quickening character—of which it is the expression. We can never interpret or justify the Church's regulated ministries, its apostolic succession, its priestly organization, unless we have started from a spiritual motive, to which these all respond; a spiritual mind, which finds in these its instinctive realization. We may argue for

ever on the expediency of Orders and Sacraments, on their picturesque value, on their historical claims. We shall never arrive at a real or decisive conclusion, however strong our case on all these secondary lines may be, so long as he with whom we discuss has a conception of faith which can never, from its own inherent motive, find itself forced to arrive at Sacraments and at Orders, as its proper and appropriate outcome.

Back, then, within and behind, not only the social fabric, but also the formal bodily structure of the Church, let us together withdraw, that we may attempt to unearth something of that deep ground of our belief in Christ which is the veritable secret of what we call our Churchmanship. Our Churchmanship! Ah! that shall not, surely, mean to us merely a desirable expediency; nor yet a dignified tradition; nor an accident of history; nor a social preference; nor a legal title to a valuable inheritance; nor a State alliance; nor a formal security that we are on the safe road; nor a conventional formula which enables us to dispense with seeking out the truth of God for ourselves; nor a stiff assertion of ecclesiastical prejudice. No! none

of this. But, rather, beneath all the shell and husk of the visible and often distorting medium through which it is expressed, it must prove itself a vital element in the substance of that spiritual act by which we inhere in Christ our King. That which shows itself in us as Churchmanship must have its roots in the innermost motions of our being as it exercises its faith. It must have in it and about it the character, not of a formal adhesion to an external system, but of an ethical motive, of a moral ideal. Then, if it were indeed of such a type, it might hope to put out its powers with a persuasive and effectual energy which would, of its own natural vitality, overwhelm opposition and convince the doubter.

Can we, at all, hope to see and to consider how this might be—what this might mean? Can we retreat from all the ground where debate is so fierce because it is so sterile—the ground where opposition is inevitable just because there is a secret cleavage within, which divides the central idea of the one party from that of the other? Can we gather ourselves together in quiet, and open out our deepest secret—here, in this your beautiful Cathedral, which, in its brooding peace, seems to hold its own

secret in itself, safe from all the hubbub and the tumult of controversy; a secret deep and inward and secure, in the sure possession of which it wins this air of unalarmed assurance? Ah! that secret, that assurance—could we but win it for our own souls, so that we might be strong and peaceful as is this ancient home of the Faith! What is it that this House of God knows so well—this quiet mystery that breathes, and stirs, and lurks, and whispers in nave and aisle and choir? Some soundless influence there is; some pressure as of a Presence, invasive, penetrating, sacramental—do we not feel it?—that lays its hand upon our souls, and arrests, and calms, and satisfies. It is here, filling this grey house—a Presence that will not be put by. It is the secret that haunts and hallows all consecrated spots, since Abraham heard the Voice of God on the summit of Moriah; since Jacob woke startled from his sleep at Bethel, and cried, “Surely God is in this place, and I knew it not!” There, in that old-world spell, which knits itself to holy places, and which identifies the invisible home of the soul with its visible embodiment on earth, we Churchmen succeed to an ancient heritage of power which has

belonged to all religions over the face of the world. And now, while we, too, pass under its sway, let us put to ourselves the questions that we have proposed. Let us ask ourselves, Why does the Church mean so much to us? Why are its very stones so full of meaning? Why do our eyes fill with tears, as we speak of our Mother Church that bore us? What is it that makes Churchmanship not a formal agreement with an external system, not a mere reverence for interesting buildings, but a real and essential fibre of the faith that is in us—a moral and spiritual force?

These are the questions that we would try to consider these four days.

And, first, the depth of the emotion that we feel, can only be accounted for, as I cannot but think, by the corporate character inherent in an act of belief in Jesus Christ. What we, as Churchmen, must, in the final resort, mean, is that, to believe at all in Jesus, is to have, by that very same act, believed in the Church. We mean that the two are inseparable, by their normal nature; and the one position to which we give a resolute and radical denial is that a Christian first completes his personal adherence to Jesus Christ as his Saviour, and

then looks about him to consider, in the second place, whether it will be well and wise for him to join a body of believers. Here, in this point, lies the secret of all our position. And in order to recognize its force, let us take our start from the language of a great living Christian teacher, who speaks both with the high authority of his office, and with the moral force of a man whose convictions have a prophetic intensity, which is, to me, unique. It is the Bishop of London, who, in a sermon preached at the consecration of Truro Cathedral,¹ rehearses this principle in all its pregnant emphasis. "Men speak," he says, "as if Christians came first, and the Church afterwards; as if the origin of the Church was in the wills of the individual Christians who composed it. But, on the contrary, throughout the teaching of the Apostles, we see that it is the Church which comes first, and the members of it afterwards. Men were not brought to Christ, and then determined that they would live in a community. Men were not brought to believe in Christ and in the Cross, and then decided that it would be a

¹ Twelve sermons preached at the consecration of Truro Cathedral. Heard & Sons : Truro. 1888.

great help to their religion that they should join one another in the worship of the Father through His Name. In the New Testament, on the contrary, the kingdom of heaven is already in existence, and men are invited into it. . . . The Church takes its origin not in the will of man, but in the will of the Lord Jesus Christ. . . . Everywhere men are called in; they do not come in, and make the Church by coming. They are called in to that which already exists; they are recognized as members when they are within; but their membership depends upon their admission, and not upon their constituting themselves a body in the sight of the Lord. In the New Testament, the Church flows out from the Lord, not flows into Him. In the New Testament, the ministers are sent forth to gather the children of men within the fold, and are not simply selected by the members of the Church to help them in their spiritual life."

Now, that passage seems to me to say everything. It has gone down to the very root of the matter. And, if we dwell a little on the fact so vigorously asserted, we may see how deep the principles run on which the fact rests. Are they not these? Faith in Jesus is the

act by which a believer passes into the Church, which is Christ's Body, Christ's New Manhood. Christ, as summing up humanity, as Himself the New Man, as Himself the Head in Whom all consist, is, in Himself, a Church—the Church of the Redeemed. He gathers into Himself all things in one. He is the Holy Society; His Personality is its constitutive Force. He is the Kingdom. Each believer in Him enters into an Organic Whole, and finds himself playing his allotted part as a member within a body. He cannot have sent his spirit out in the movement which we call faith without, by that very fact, entering into union with One Who is united by an identical bond with all those who have so believed. Therefore faith is inconceivable as a lonely act of a solitary soul. It is rather the effort by which the soul flings itself out of its loneliness, out of that sterile isolation into which the disruptive and corroding death of sin, which sunders all ties, has drearily cast it, and passes, at a rush, by a leap, into the warm and healthy companionship of a compact society—the kingdom of heaven. The kingdom! It is a kingdom into which he steps; a kingdom which closes in around

him, and clasps him about with friendly embracement; a kingdom which reaches away far above out of his sight, in ordered sequences of ministry and love, knit fast to one another by regulated interchange of gifts—principalities, and powers, and dominions, and lordships. Up and up they spread, ring above ring, sphere within sphere, until they are linked by invisible bonds into that central glory which is the Home of God. And round and about him on every side spreads the rich splendour of a realm that is alive with concerted companies, all aglow with serviceable motions, gliding to and fro in the rapid and serene succession of ordained industries. And, through all, there goes the strong pulsations of that eternal song which takes its rhythm from the reasonable worship of those four and twenty elders who for ever bow their heads under the recognized counsels of the purpose of God, and cast their crowns before them on the glassy sea, and utter their unpausing Liturgy, "Amen; Alleluia!" And there are vast world-judgments that are proceeding with the orderly movement of a fixed programme; and there are swift messengers that pass and repass with signs and cries. And there are thunderings, and lightnings, and voices.

This is the kingdom, reaching from heaven to earth, and from one end of time unto the other, into which the soul, by its earliest venture of faith, has leaped. This is the imperial life into which it has been caught; a life that beats out its tremendous music through the roar and rush of harmonious multitudes—ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousand thousands. The soul may not have guessed it beforehand; it may only have known the strange drawings of Jesus, the good Shepherd, Who had sought it over dark hills, and had died to save it from the devouring wolf. It may not perceive it even after it has believed; for it may be so absorbed in the amazing peace of finding itself safe and forgiven within the arms of God, that it is made blind, as it were, to all else that is happening about it. Its own personal act of faith—that blessed deed by which it crossed over out of the black depths of the tumultuous sea, clinging to the strong Hand that held it, into the quiet of the steady shore—may seem to it all in all, beyond which it cannot think or look. So it may lie, shut up within its private experience of Jesus, without suspecting all the wonderful secret which lies hid in the mystery of that

experience. But that is its own limitation. That is a temporary confusion. It is dazed by the excess of light. It has not yet won the use of its eyes. As soon as it can begin to look about, and take the measure of its situation, it discovers the nature of this new world into which it has entered. It has not got still to win its entry. It does not see a holy society far off in heaven, beyond the grave, into which its faith may give it the assurance that at the close of its pilgrimage it may hope, if it be loyal, to finally enter. No! its pilgrim's progress towards the Heavenly City is already past. It is in now, within the outer gates; within, at least, the frontiers of the Delectable Land. Its faith in Jesus has admitted it, before it knew all the joy that it involved. It discovers itself to be sitting in heavenly places with Christ. Lo! this is the wonder, at the glory of which it falls in abasement, shrinking yet updrawn, humbled yet emboldened. This is the wonder, that it is come (so it finds)—come already “unto Mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and Church of the first-

born, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel."

My brethren, we will try, by God's grace, to-morrow, to see how this conception of the primal act of faith, which lies at the base of all our Churchmanship, opens out into more and more significance.¹ For to-day, let it suffice to remind ourselves of the splendour of our high calling.

"We are come unto Mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God!" That is where our personal salvation has carried us. The Church is the perpetual declaration of that enkindling news. It refuses to allow this verity to appear as an afterthought, as a separable accident to our soul's health. No! to be saved is, of its own inherent nature, if only we understood it, to be saved into a Church; to be saved into an assembly of the firstborn—a city of God. What a width, what a richness, what a strength, what a peace, in such a conception!

¹ As to its bearing on our conception of Christian believers who do not adhere to the visible Church, may I venture to refer to a Sermon on "Corporate Faith," in "On Behalf of Belief"?

There is a very common picture, seen in shop-windows, which will illustrate what I mean. It is the picture of a woman, lost in some wreck, who is clinging with passionate arms round a Cross on a lonely rock, safe while the terror of the sea storms round her, flinging its wild spray over her, as if in fury at losing its prey. That picture roughly but vividly portrays the soul saved in Jesus. But what if, on recovering her footing, she found it was no lonely rock in the midst of the seas on to which she had been thrown, but was a headland of her own true country? Look! it is the blessed coast of home. There, far away stretch the low cliffs, so dear, so intimate! And there are the long lines of pleasant hills, sloping sweetly to the shore; and, behind her, spread green fields, and happy woods, and leafy lawns; and there are white homesteads half hidden in the trees, and a church tower round which the cottage roofs are crowded; and far beyond lies, in tender haze, the kindly plain. Oh! no barren, solitary rock this. These are the hills of home that glimmer in the sheen. It is the coast of home on which she has been flung, out of the waves of death. The headland where she is cast may, indeed,

be wild and haggard ; but, for all that, it is part and parcel of the mainland ; she can travel thither without a break. She is joined already—though she lies on the very edge, within the sound of the billows—to her own country, and her father's house.

Now, that is where we lie, you and I, beloved. Some are just cast up out of the loud sea. Some have journeyed a little further inland. Some have gone far and seen much, and tell us strange tales of what they have seen. And these we call saints.

But all are one ; all are within one coast-line. We, the worst, just dragged out of our sins, just tossed on to the nearest headland, are still united to the rest ; we are within the border ; we belong to the Church of God. We are come, by the very act by which we were saved, “unto Mount Zion, unto the city of the living God, unto the assembly of the firstborn”—into the kingdom of heaven.

“ Safe home, safe home, in port ! ”

It is the home of the soul to which we have come ; home, among our own people ; a home wide, friendly, peopled, enduring ! This is the honour of our salvation, that we are no more

strangers and pilgrims. We are made "fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God; built upon the apostles and prophets, with Jesus Christ Himself as the chief Corner-Stone; in Whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord."

God grant us grace to enlarge our vision, that we may be able to comprehend what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height of this our majestic inheritance! "Unto Whom be glory in the Church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen."

II.

THE VISIBLE CITY.

“Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God ; and are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief Corner-Stone ; in Whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord : in Whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit.”—Eph. ii. 19-22.

REVEREND FATHER IN GOD, BRETHREN OF
THE CLERGY,

We have arrived, no doubt, at a very exalted ideal of Christian citizenship.

But what has all this to do, it may well be asked, with that commonplace and respectable institution, the Church, as we know it, in England, or in Wales ? It is well enough to talk this high language about heavenly places, where our citizenship lies, hid with Christ in God. We can appreciate the breadth and richness which such imaginings give to our conception of faith, in comparison with the pinched and individualistic treatment of it as

a mere private affair of our own with God. But it is a long leap from all this invisible kingdom of Heaven to the very visible and very familiar Church on earth. What has your narrow, formal Anglican Churchmanship, with its mixed story, with its burden of abuses,—what has it to do with this free home of the Redeemer, where life moves on wings of flame and in the passion of multitudinous song? After lifting us so high, down you bid us drop, with broken wing, to jarring music, as soon as you claim that we should identify this spiritual vision with the vicar, and the curate, and the churchwarden, and the clerk, at their old dry routine in the parish church.

Now, all of us surely know, to our heart's bitterness, this dreary antithesis of the visible and the invisible. We inside the Church can be as sensitive to its shock as those who force the taunt upon us from without. Yes, it is a jar; it rasps our nerves to pass from one to the other. The failure is blatant; the jibe at it stings.

Nevertheless, I am absolutely certain that all solid Churchmanship does rest, in the end, upon belief in this identification, which looks, on the face of it, so ridiculous. And no one will ever understand what Churchmanship means,

or rightly estimate the strength of its convictions, who does not recognize at work, at its root, the sense that this identification can be justified. The vision of an eternal society, of a redeemed kingdom into which our faith has transferred us—this it is which stirs and prompts and kindles our belief in a visible Church on earth. This is its spring, its justification. Through our recognition of this social and corporate character which belongs to the very essence of faith, and which is realized in that heavenly citizenship, we are driven to feel about after that which will, in some measure at least, correspond to it, here and now, before our eyes, under our hands, at our feet, in tangible fact. We cannot but search for some reflection of its image ; we listen eagerly for some echoes of its high music ; we catch at the signs of its presence ; we close with the promise and pledge of its forthcoming growth. Blurred though that image be by our long sinning, faint and discordant as are the broken echoes of that song, we see it through its shame, and the tears spring to our eyes ; we hear it in frail snatches of melody that pass and are gone ; and lo ! as we listen we walk the golden streets of Jerusalem, the city of the soul.

This glory of the invisible it is which transfigures for us the visible. It is always there behind the clouds, which it colours and illumines even while they obscure it. The meagre whitewashed church, the dreary service, the vicar, and the clerk, wear a new aspect, are touched with a pathetic light, as we remember what they represent. We hold on to them, we clothe them about with interest and obligation and affection, just because of that far splendour, which lends them something of its dignity and its worth. In that bare and humble scene we still discern Him Who moveth amid the golden candlesticks.

And then, as we see Him condescending from His invisible throne to abide and reign in our visible and base habitation, we recall how He, "being in the form of God," yet clung not to the glory of it, but "made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men." It is the very law of the Incarnation, this condescension of spirit to flesh, of invisible to visible. We recognize the touch of Him Who, when He took upon Him to deliver man, did not shrink from the lowest humiliation, and abhorred not

the Virgin's womb. The poor broken scraps that we can pick up into baskets here, in our earthly sanctuaries, are a pledge to us of that High Feast where men sit and eat, and see God. They tell us of Him Who despised nothing, and would let nothing be lost, but Who brought within the compass of His orderly government even the cast-off fragments which man threw aside as waste.

We find, then, that our belief in the Incarnation prepares us for the unideal character of the Church as we know and see it. It is not that we lapse from the strain of believing in the invisible city, and take refuge in the easier and coarser lodgment that the outward Church offers to our flagging spirits. Rather, it is according to the measure of our faith in the invisible, that we give our hearts to the visible. Because of our ardour of faith in that Jerusalem on high, therefore we pour out our love upon the Jerusalem below. And, indeed, so strong is this necessity, that I own to doubting whether there can possibly be any real and robust belief in an invisible society of saints; in the spiritual Body of Christ; in the mystical kingdom of the New Manhood created in Christ Jesus our Lord; which will not, of sheer

necessity, demand a visible Church as its proper fulfilment.

For consider what is involved. If faith, from its first birth, necessitates social relationships, membership in a body; if these relationships, this membership, are in its very blood, and spring out of its native and inherent nature; then faith itself remains stunted, arrested, blighted, if something social and corporate is not already about it from the start; not added on as after-thought; not adopted for the sake of wholesome expedencies, or æsthetic decoration, or seemly formalities; but growing up level with faith's growth, and disclosing its predetermined existence, unfolding its implanted obligations, as part and portion of the life of faith itself; as an external reflection of internal necessities; as a universal law within which all regenerate individual developments are bound to fall. This is our firm principle. Faith here on earth must have its foretaste of what heaven will achieve. Is that not so? Is not that what we all believe? And heaven will be a city, a kingdom. That much is positively certain. Well, then, here too that kingdom, that city, must have shown themselves, must

have put forth their signs; the play and counter-play of the inward faith and its outward environment must have begun. For in this interchanging play lies all the growth of the Christian life. That life steadies itself, it advances itself, it moves upward towards its consummation, by discovering the nature of the sphere within which it has been brought, and in relation to which it develops its activities. A lonely faith is an undeveloped, undiscovered, untested, unedified faith. Like a man cast on a desert island, it is shut off from its growth; it cannot open out its natural germs. It is through the slowly realized recognition of its part in the manifold and multitudinous kingdom of which it has become a member, that it discloses its increasing capacities.

Faith, then, and the Church which is the sphere in which it lives and breathes and moves, are naturally correlative terms. If only our blunders and our sins had not rent the seamless coat, and had not disturbed the normal balance of the elements which build up the life, the idea of opposition, of collision, between the individual faith and the society in which it realized itself, would sound to us

as futile as if the force of steam was opposed to the machine which it was appointed to work, or the spirit to the body which is its unique or perfect vessel.

As soon as faith, then, has begun, it needs something of a Church to encompass it about with the warmth of citizenship, and with the material for its exercise. It ought to expect to find an external organization, positive, intelligible, orderly, constitutional; showing itself under the fashions of earthly existence; and therefore, in some visible form, under some local and material conditions. All these epithets, local, visible, material, far from being offensive to it, will correspond to its demand for an external and durable structure—a present witness, in the midst of this natural world of outward facts, to the reality of the kingdom that has indeed come on earth. The Church is the proof offered to faith that the kingdom of heaven has, indeed, arrived. It is here; it can be found, and known, by those who have eyes to see.

This was the original preaching of the “kingdom of heaven.” The phrase does not carry us off from earth to heaven, from the visible to the invisible. It ought to do exactly

the reverse. It brings heaven down to earth. It starts in heaven ; it works out upon earth. For it declares, not that there is a heaven elsewhere, but that the heaven, which is eternally existent round the throne of God, where angels and archangels for ever move in harmonious obedience to the Name and Will of God, has, at last, let itself down from heaven to earth ; has extended its scientific frontier so as to include redeemed mankind ; has pushed forward its lines so as to cover at least a portion of our present world, with the promise of ever thrusting forward its dominion until it has taken in the whole face of the earth. As fast as it works its way, it draws the ground that it has won from evil under the sway of that one unbroken law which constitutes the kingdom of heaven. From the uttermost edge and fringe of that kingdom, here on the surface of the earth—that edge which marks the spot to which, at this moment, its dominion has spread and established itself—this body of law and system and structure extends, without a breach in its unity, to the highest place where Christ, the King, is seated at the Right Hand of Power.

The kingdom of heaven has come here :

that is our good news! It lets itself down like a net, to gather in of every kind; like the sheet lowered from heaven by the four corners, wherein were all kinds of flesh—even as St. Peter saw it. And ever, therefore, wherever it can establish its footing, it aims at turning all the earthly material, all the humanity that it wins, into evidence of its unity, its uniformity, its regularity, its permanence, its order, its beauty. This was its prime office—to gain the visible over to its side, that it might become proof-positive of the reality of the invisible. That was to be the mode in which the kingdom should spread. Its gradual conquest of the world would be marked by the line of its visible success. Step by step, it would press that line forward. Slowly, steadily, by the accumulated pressure of the redeemed and ordered material, built up by the unceasing action of the Holy Ghost into a single and solid and massive whole, it was to overbear, by its weight and volume, the kingdoms of this world, overturning thrones and empires with the real invincible persistence of actual force, such as can break, shatter, bruise, as with a rod of iron, the barriers set up against it, until, not as in some visionary dream, not as in some

remote ideal, not as in some cloudland of enthusiastic prophecy, but in sober and literal fact, under our very eyes, the kingdoms of this earth had gone under, and become the one kingdom of the Lamb.

My brethren, that was the primal conception of Christianity. That is primitive; that is apostolic; that is biblical. That is the high secret which the first band of believers treasured up from the final utterances of the Lord, as given on the Mount of Olivet, as expounded in the great Apocalypse. That, and nothing short of that. And we, of these latter days, so far as our miserable divisions have dissolved the practical reality of this conception, and have driven us, for a pitiful refuge, into the shadowy vision of an invisible and unearthly Church, which can never carry its inner secret forward into evident and actual victory; can never give visible proof of its inherent unity; can never band together its dispersed efforts into a substantial and organic attack on sin, or interweave its scattered voices into an audible or recognized act of harmonious worship, or move over the face of the earth as an army with banners—we, so far as this is denied us, are compelled to live below the level of the scriptural hope; we have lost

half its fulness and have impoverished its inspiration.

This, then, is the central idea of the kingdom that has come down here among men, in which the Will of God should be done on earth as it is in heaven. And, starting from this, we can understand why our Lord, according to all the four Gospels, considered His public preaching and healing to be entirely subordinate to His main and dominant aim of forming the elements of a compact society—of a Church—which should be welded into solid unity by accurate and conscious knowledge of His personal Name, so that against that basal rock the gates of hell might not prevail. We understand why this kingdom, so founded, should, according to His ideal and scheme, be visible, as a city set on a hill, as a candle set high and clear upon a candlestick. We understand why the kingdom could not so come until He could discharge, from His living and exalted Person, the Spirit, the very bond of unity, Who could work all separate believers up into the one Body, allotting each his separate function, as stones in a single building. We understand why the fittest preparation for that Spirit's arrival lay in completing the full number of the Apostolic

company; and why the primal acts of faith went out in close organization round the Apostolic government, which was accepted by all as supreme, and unique, and essential; and why it was the primary sign of a right faith for all to be gathered in one spot; to sit round one table; to eat of one loaf; to have all things in common.

Ah, yes! and we can then understand the terrible strain of the drama recorded in the Acts of the Apostles, as the mingling of Jew and Gentile forced the problem of an organic unity to the front. Then we can comprehend how the burning agitation of the hour gathered round such external questions as those of meats and drinks, or of circumcision; for in these points lay the supreme decision, whether the Church could preserve its corporate character as a single Society of brethren, sharing in a common meal, united, under a constitutive and a structural principle, into an act of worship in which Jew and Gentile formed but one family, one household. It is the visible organized fellowship of the faithful in one Church which is in such dire peril, if believers cannot meet at the same table. That is why the problem is so terribly urgent. The unity of the Church is threatened.

So, again, we can understand the passion of that fight that bursts, like a flame, through St. Paul's Epistles. We can understand how it was that the great Apostle of personal faith was also, in perfect consistency with himself, the great master of organization, as he is named in that most remarkable book on the Church under the Roman Empire, in which Professor Ramsay has thrown the light of his Asiatic researches with such startling emphasis, on the organizing power of St. Paul. It becomes intelligible to us how it was that the man who wrote the Epistles to the Romans and Galatians, the text-books of individual conversion, is the same who poured out his whole soul, throughout the Epistles to the Ephesians and Colossians and Philippians, in his inspired and rapturous portrayal of that corporate Church, which was itself the completed purpose of the Majesty of God ; was itself the fulness of Him that filleth all in all ; was itself the very Body of Christ, with "joints and bands fitly joined together, having nourishment ministered according to the effectual working in the measure of every part," so that, by this systematic evolution, it may "increase with the increase of God."

The Spirit in the heart of the believer, crying "Abba, Father," is the same Spirit Who creates the organization of the corporate brotherhood. Faith and the Church are correlative terms; they intersect and interact at every point. This is Pauline theology; and St. Paul is himself our perfect type of the true combination. The evangelical preacher and the wide-eyed statesman have in him coalesced. With his heart on fire for salvation by grace, he yet embraces within his keen vision the spacious articulation of imperial Rome. He detects in her something congenial, something intimately suggestive of the organic structure of that mystery which it is in his hands to disclose and interpret. Therefore he is glad to lay down the lines of his work and of his hope alongside of her network of roads and colonies. He takes her measures and her rules by which to determine the ordered framework of that Gentile world, which was to manifest the catholicity of the Cross of Christ. And as we follow him up and down that regulated empire, so comprehensive, so expansive, so large-minded; as we recognize his growing delight in the width and the splendour of this dominion, over against which he sets

his majestic ideals of Catholic Unity in the Epistles of the captivity; as we note the imperial instinct of government which he exhibits throughout his Pastoral Letters, in which we see him in his seat as statesman and ruler, ordering, ordaining, selecting, distributing, covering every detail of distant provinces with the very glance with which he gazes into the high mystery of godliness;—as we watch all this, we can, indeed, begin to understand all the wistful passion that drew him towards the central home of that government and empire, and kept ever breaking from his lips in the noticeable phrase, “I must see Rome.”

“Rome!” He must see it, because it was the then focus of the world’s organized forces, the type and crown of secular civilization. That is what fascinated him. It seemed to challenge him to meet and overpass its vast ordering of the powers that make human society by a spiritual brotherhood no less complete and universal and real and far-reaching.

Rome has long ago ceased to embody that which made it so symbolic, so significant to St. Paul. The world’s civilization has left the ancient centre far behind. Social order no

longer clusters round the narrow Mediterranean shore. It has passed over the Atlantic and Pacific. It has ceased to be imperial ; it has become nationalistic and industrial. It has formed new centres, and shown novel wonders of combination and co-ordination.

But wherever it went, and whatever it did, thither St. Paul would follow it. Still he would match with its organization, the undying organization of the kingdom of heaven. Still he would challenge the Secular Order to be more complete, or more Catholic, than the Order of Christ's Society. Still he would strive to show that the Church had a fellowship to lay alongside of the social fellowship which men had raised for themselves. And the old passion which made him say twelve hundred years ago, "I must see Rome," would drive him on and on with equal force to face the new conditions of industrial organization, and to cry, "I, the Apostle of the City of God, must, at all costs, see Paris, and London, and Manchester, and New York."

Such was St. Paul, prophet and statesman, preacher and churchman. But alas ! this wonderful coalescence in him of the inward and the outward, of the invisible and the

visible, of the personal and the catholic, of faith and government, has suffered cruel divorce. The twain, that God had joined together, lie sundered by the sins of men. The gospel of Pauline faith has learned to dread and to loathe the tyranny of Catholic government. And the Pauline instinct of government has lost much of its Eastern unction, of its mystery, of its visionary elasticity, of its spiritual freedom ; and has stiffened, under the handling of Western lawyers and Latin systematizers, into something formal, regulative, military—into a model discipline, into an external rule of jurisdiction. The contrasted tempers, which should be knit fast into a single complete Apostolic character, have drawn apart into growling suspicion of one another, to the bitter damage of both. And Christendom lies divided ; and who can now say how either side of the divided whole is to use that magnificent language in which St. Paul rolls out for us the ideal type of the Catholic Church? For him, as he saw that immortal vision of a living and integral Catholicity—itself but the evidence and the witness here on earth, in its visible unity, of that immeasurable kingdom which rose rank beyond rank, sphere

beyond sphere, ring beyond ring, from its uttermost outskirts here on the edge of this redeemed world, up to its Imperial Home where the one and only Head, Himself the King of kings, the supreme Emperor and Governor, the First and the Last, is seated on the heavenly throne, and yet moves here amidst the golden candlesticks—for him there was no such dreadful divorce; for him there was no miserable antithesis; for him, invisible and visible were fused, through the heat of the Holy Spirit, into one tremendous fact—the Church of God.

But, for us, the two are no longer co-terminous, no longer co-ordinated and inveterately convolved. And we are forced to use his great language with a difference; with humiliating apologies; with heart-breaking qualifications. When we speak of “the Church” in its formal and legal and visible correctness, we have to recall how much that does in principle belong essentially to the Church lies outside its formal borders; so that we are unable to discover the joints and bands which correlate its true faith in Jesus with the articulated body of organized believers.

There is now an invisible Church larger than

the visible. Sadly we confess it. And this unfortunate cleavage confuses our language; and the confusion intensifies the misunderstandings; and so it comes about that half St. Paul's Epistles are incomprehensible to the one side or the other. We shall never read him aright again, never enter into the swing and motion of his splendid fervour, until the two whom God first joined together have once more learned to cleave each to each; and inward faith in the heart and outward realization in the Body are become one thing.

Everywhere, throughout all the scattered fragments of Christendom, the desire for reunion is pathetically stirring. Wistfully we look at each other across dividing gulfs, and yearn for the larger, deeper life, from out of which the petty and pitiful waste of divisions will have ceased. But this desire can only get forward beyond the stage of tentative advances, if it be based on the recognition that the unity which it seeks springs out of the essential forces of the faith, and is their proper and consistent condition. The impulse to reunite will never be strong enough to accomplish its purpose, so long as we glorify the invisible Church, as the ideal of the Spirit. We

shall begin to draw together as soon as we all recognize that this invisible spiritual Church (if so we may for the moment call it), far from repudiating and despising a visible realization in an organic and articulated and material embodiment, is, on the contrary, originally framed so as to demand it. Christ endowed that spiritual faith in Himself which came to life and expression through the confession of St. Peter, with the character of a social and corporate act. "Thou art Peter." Upon this truth confessed by you, "I will build," not your salvation, but "My Church." It was a community, a Church, which came to the birth in that personal effort of an Apostle. And such an act must have a structural form, must find an intelligible and visible issue, in order that it may realize its social character. It must contain in itself a tendency towards this realization. Without it, it must feel deprived of its natural fulfilment. Until it has identified its inner motive with an outward order and fabric and church, it is in exile. True, it may be taught, in the isolation of exile, to gain a deeper insight, a loftier spirit, even as Israel in captivity won a new hold on the revelation that it had so stubbornly resisted in the days of its honour.

Yet, for all that, though the captivity alone could have exalted it to achieve its spiritual conquest, it could not sing the full songs of Zion in a strange land; its harps hung idly on the Babylonian willows, and all its heart and all its soul yearned after that Jerusalem, lost and ruined, which it remembered from afar with such passionate love—the hill of Zion which it could never forget. Forget! Ah! no, indeed! Not until the right hand had forgotten all its cunning, not until its tongue clave to the roof of its mouth, could it fail to recall, in tender song, the dear name of Jerusalem, the city of God! And can those of our Zion, who have been driven further afield than we ourselves, and are unable to move in and out of the familiar courts of the temple—even though they still are forced to sustain their protest of isolation, yet can they at all forget that it was not always so? Can they forget the rock whence they were hewn? Can they forget to pray for the peace of Jerusalem—for the recovery of the unity and honour of the city of God?

“The city of God!” Yes! for there is a city; an actual city, with gates, and streets, and houses, and temples, to which all belong.

No Christian doubted it for fifteen hundred years. And that city is ours still! It is within us; all baptized Christians are ready to be enrolled as its citizens. Only there are breaches in its walls to be repaired, and but a remnant of its townspeople cling on within the actual circuit of its gates, and many more true citizens wander far in strange lands, and cannot win their way home.

This is the city which all desire to recover. But then, if this is so, it is clear that recovery must lie in rebuilding the old city which has existed from the beginning. If Christ built a city; if He constituted His believers into a society, a kingdom, as most certainly He did; if faith in Him from the very first was set within the circuit of a Church, as its own inner nature necessitated;—then the site, at least, of our Zion has been fixed, its foundations have been laid, its radical structure has been in essential outline defined. We cannot hope to come together again by abandoning the old site, and by starting to build an entirely new city, with an organization created by our own skill in view of present emergencies. Such a hope might commend itself by offering to set us free from all the encumbering quarrels

of the past. But it could only do so at the cost of abandoning the very past with which it is the purpose of the city to unite us. That city cannot spring into existence to-day; for it is no true city of God unless those of the past, our forefathers in the faith, belonged to it. This is its very object, to be the strong, enduring witness to the unity that knits us fast, through the martyr and the saint, back to those apostles and prophets who framed the earliest order of that building whose Foundation-Stone is Jesus Christ the Lord. Our city is nothing, if it is not the home, not only of those who desire to be united to-day, but of all who ever have called upon the Name of Christ ages before we were born—all who have prayed and died round about the churches where our fathers lie buried. Any city that proposes to unite us together now, must unite us also to the dead in Christ. Nothing short of that can even frame an offer.

We cannot, therefore, escape from the terrible heritage of disaster which the story of the past has brought upon us by starting afresh on some new basis or convention, which will treat the past as if it had not been. To recover this lost unity of Zion, to rebuild the city

on its ancient and primitive foundation—this, our supreme desire, cannot now but be a long and difficult achievement, which unwearying prayer and the patient years, as they unroll the purpose of a merciful God, can alone hope to attain.

And if loyalty to the past forbids us a new start on a fresh and clean site, so, too, loyalty to all that the past has recorded and taught us, prohibits us from forsaking, in the longing for immediate union with the vast body of Western Christendom, the original and primitive lines of the foundation. Blessed as it would be for us to join hands with all those who go up into the House of the Lord, we may never presume to do it at the cost of an intellectual lie; at the cost of what is, to us, at least, a falsification of history; at the cost of accepting an exaggerated and unauthorized and unapostolic claim which has, in its zeal for the unity of Christendom, succeeded only too often in dividing it.

No! we may not adopt a violent expedient for securing visible unity at all hazards, any more than we may, out of our Christian courtesy, propose any mode of reunion which might happen to eliminate or avoid our present

differences. The unity of the Church is the gift of its Head, in Whom alone it possesses any unity at all. And let us remember that the visible and completed unity of His Church is distinct from its basal unity (as Father Puller has so well reminded us).¹ Its unity is inherent, essential, universal. Our Lord implanted its germinal force, which still holds together the entire Church. It is, indeed, He Himself. But its visible, tangible, realized unity would be given according to the measure of the Church's faith and holiness. It would not always, or necessarily, be there; for our Lord prayed for it, as for a thing to be zealously gained, and anxiously retained or recovered. According to its visible unity would be its capacity to witness against the world. With the shrinking, with the retreat of its visibility, would its witness languish. But still its vital, structural unity will survive, waiting for better days. Still the great prayer of the Lord would work in it and for it; interceding for the recovery of the lost external unity, which will be given back again when once His Church is faithful to His Spirit of unity, which is the very bond of peace.

¹ "The Primitive Saints and the See of Rome," pp. 231-234.

Christ alone, then, is the Head, from Whom unity can flow down. And any expedient for securing temporal unity on earth, which at all obscures the living Headship of Christ only, or is inconsistent with His Mind as it is made known to us in His manifested Life through the authority of that Spirit of God Which we possess, and in the possession of Whom we have the Mind of Christ, must, in the end, defeat its own aim. Christ is our Head, by clinging to Whom we may come at last, "in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ."

Cling, then, to Him, Who will, in His own way and at His own time, restore unity and hope and peace to Israel. Cling to His Mind made known in Scripture, interpreted to each by the Living Spirit. Cling solely to Him.

What strange ways He has of working? Who can anticipate His counsels? Who can penetrate His secret? Who can tell what He may bring about?

Recall for your consolation St. Paul, gazing across the gulf that sundered the Israel of faith

from the Israel of His blood and of His bone. How desperate that disaster! How deadly a breach in the determined counsels of God! Everything had been designed for the union of the chosen people with the multitudes who were to be gathered out of every land into the one fold. Yet it broke—the Church broke in twain! Most terrible! And now St. Paul weeps bitter tears into the salt seas that roll, as it were, between the cliffs that had been rent asunder! Yet, as he gazes, a new vision dawns upon him. God has not deserted His people. God has not despaired. He is at work, to turn even this violent breach to good purpose. By the division He will spur on either side to fresh effort. Israel shall provoke the Gentile, and the Gentile shall provoke Israel. God works His own blessed way and will through this split; and at last, by the very sting of mutual provocation, both fall together again. Both shall be grafted in. There shall be one olive tree. And oh, the full and glorious heritage that will follow that reunion! Centuries may be taken in working out that result. But St. Paul looks on to the end, and still rejoices!

What of the individuals meantime? Gentiles,

who were born and died of old in darkness? Jews, who never lived to pass out of their nation's blindness? That does not matter to him the least. The mighty purpose that works itself out on the immense field of history will make itself good to the little lives that come and go under the rhythm of its operations. God sees the end; and in that end He views the individual life as it passes. In the end, all is made good; in the end, all will be justified. The end will work out right—will restore peace.

“O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and the knowledge of God! how unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out! Who hath known the mind of the Lord?” “Of Him, and through Him, and to Him, are all things, to Whom be glory for ever.”

“Who hath known the mind of the Lord?” Is not that our guiding text? Any one—any Church—which ventures to come before us, in view of all the complications of a divided Christendom, with some petty cut-and-dried scheme, which professes to interpret the whole mind of the Lord, stands condemned by making such an offer. For the workings of Divine Providence upon matter so strange

and sad cannot but be dim, vast, mysterious, intricate. We can look on, like St. Paul, and be sure that the Lord is not ignoring our divisions—not simply disregarding the breaches in His city, but is most assuredly working, through them, to a restored union, deeper and purer than any before. It will come, if we are faithful to hold fast what we have; to yield to His drawing; to pray for visible and realized peace.

But we cannot force it. He must give it; He must bring it. Though we wait through centuries, it must come from Him. We know not how, for who hath known His mind? But come it must. And, in that assurance, we will even now enter into the prophetic joy of St. Paul, and cry, "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and the knowledge of God! how unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out!"

III.

THE WORSHIP OF THE CITY.

“And after these things I heard a great voice of much people in heaven, saying, Alleluia ; Salvation, and glory, and honour, and power, unto the Lord our God : for true and righteous are His judgments : for He hath judged the great whore, which did corrupt the earth with her fornication, and hath avenged the blood of His servants at her hand. And again they said, Alleluia. And her smoke rose up for ever and ever. And the four and twenty elders and the four beasts fell down and worshipped God that sat on the throne, saying, Amen ; Alleluia. And a voice came out of the throne, saying, Praise our God, all ye His servants, and ye that fear Him, both small and great. And I heard as it were the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunders, saying, Alleluia : for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth.”
—REV. xix. 1-6.

REVEREND FATHER IN GOD, BRETHREN OF THE CLERGY,

Who can wonder, after what we have been saying together, at the fervour and the tenacity with which we, who are of the Church, whether in England or Wales, cling to that special privilege of our heritage, which links

us back into the constitutional fabric of that abiding city, which has its foundation in Prophet and Apostle, and for its Corner-Stone Jesus Christ Himself? However tangled our story has been, however terrible our sins, however severe the blows of judgment by which God's Hand, through history, has chastised us, in His great compassion He has still permitted us to preserve the elemental conditions of that visible unity by which His Church was intended to express and to realize its inner spiritual union with Him, its Head, through Whom, "by joints and bands having nourishment ministered," it may be at unity in itself.

The Catholic Priesthood, its Liturgy, its Sacraments, here they are, still ours—the pledges in our hands that we are not cut off from the blessed joy of saying, "Thus the citizens of Jerusalem have ever prayed so long as they have dwelt in the courts of the Lord, on the hill of Zion. Thus the holy hands of the Priest were ever lifted in praise and benediction. Thus the Sacrifice was ever pleaded, and the oblations laid, and the words of propitiation and thanksgiving uttered. Thus our fathers knelt at the Altar, and took into their hands the Bread of Life; from this very Chalice, which we yet pass

round, in our Mother Church, they drank, athirst for God, of the Living Blood, which is drink indeed. Ah! pray God that our children yet unborn, in the generations that are to come, may still pass in at the same door, and listen to the like tones of consecration, and taste of the same Cup, and lie down to die under the same assurance of pardon and consolation." No wonder, indeed, if we passionately cling, with unconquerable loyalty, to mercies such as these. To surrender them for the sake of a local and temporary alliance with those, our neighbours, who now so tenderly touch us by their brotherly appeal, would be to surrender the only instruments of that ultimate unity which can alone restore the full kingdom unto Israel. For these our privileges are themselves, we must believe, the elemental fibres and ligaments by which the Body of Christ coheres with itself in all ages; they are themselves the constructive joints by which the parts of the building may yet again be put together in the day when the Lord draws His whole Church once more into harmony with itself. They afford us our full opportunity of entering into that co-ordinated fellowship in the future; and they carry us back, in the past,

into communion with those multitudes upon multitudes, beyond all human numbering, who have found a home for the soul's adorations within the lines of those immemorial Liturgies, which link the agelong worship of the Church to the memories of Jewish hymn and prayer and to Apostolic ministrations in that earliest Church which was of "one heart and one mind," and came together in one body, on the steps of the Temple, and in the sacred upper chamber in Jerusalem.

The Liturgy of the Church! My brethren, let us remember that, amid the wreck and ruin of a shattered Christendom, it is the Liturgy which holds the promise and potency of union. For in the Liturgy we arrive at the Church's innermost secret, at its most persistent core of witness, at its deepest bond. In its Liturgy we are admitted into its heart of hearts; we touch the central springs of its Divine life; we kneel and gaze at the wonderful ways by which it holds actual present communion as a body with its Head. We go down to a ground of unity behind all matters of jurisdiction; behind even the problems of dogma. Jurisdiction may serve as an outward security for unity against disorder; dogma may be an

essential protection for unity under the pressure of intellectual questions. But neither of these constitute the unity which holds us together into one Body. That unity is a unity of life ; and our life is worship. Where there is one worship, there is one Church ; for worship is the breath of its being, the beat of its blood, the soul of its body.

Therefore it was that, in the cataclysm of the Reformation, when the storm that cleared the air shook so much to the ground, our own Church clung fast, at all hazards, to the primitive and radical Liturgical worship. To secure this, in its authentic and catholic form, she desperately fought through the wild days of Elizabeth, and through the savage warfare that followed, holding on, often by trembling hands, to the very horns of the altar. With this, her holy and sufficient prize, she re-emerged from the terror into the assured peace of the Restoration. Through the possession of this, she makes her claim to be no isolated and accidental peculiarity of her island, but part and parcel of a vaster kingdom than can be covered by the name of England. By virtue of this, she has eyes to look out over the waters, and to take the measure of wider

horizons. She can venture to foretell a day that may yet come, when Christendom may be stirred from the extreme West to the uttermost East, as with the soundings of a common heart ; and the impulse of a mighty brotherhood may wake and move ; and the passion for some unity, below and beyond all that divides us, may become imperative.

If such a day should, by the grace of God, ever dawn, it will be in the unity of a common worship that the bond must be found. Those Christians are one who can participate in each other's act of worship. And English Christians who would bear their part in that day of concord must have that in their worship which will reach out far beyond the mere borders of English-speaking Christianity ; that which will be recognized as a point of attachment, as an intelligible pledge of peace, by French and Italian, by German and by Russian, by Greek and Armenian and Egyptian.

And it is, therefore, in trust for the whole body of English Christianity that we tenaciously retain those liturgical and sacramental materials for such a Catholic reunion—in trust against that hour for all who may then feel the need of possessing real and corporate

and authentic acts, acknowledged as such by their far brethren of other speech and colour and story ; by which to recover and exercise their full citizenship in the visible kingdom on earth, which is the creation and the completion of that invisible citizenship in the kingdom of heaven, to which they are all committed by the baptismal pledge.

And now, through the memory of our Liturgy, let us draw nearer to that ground on which we would speak together for the remainder of our Conference, *i.e.* the inner spiritual and moral value of belief in the Divine significance of the Church.

And, my brethren, in so meditating together on all the inspiring force which belief in a Church should bring into our practical lives, we shall not be indulging in Pharisaic pride of privilege. Rather, alas ! we shall be humbling ourselves even into the dust, as we record the obligations that we have falsified, the ideals that we have betrayed, the glories that we have put to open shame, the resources that we have neglected, the gifts that we have despised. How pitiful, how scanty, has been the manifestation in ourselves of the fruits of this majestic Creed in the Holy Catholic Church ! Men have learned to regard, as the

sure outcome of such a Creed, everything rather than the beautiful fulness of the perfected Christian character, which, nevertheless, is its only lawful issue. We are not, then, parading our virtues, but confessing our miserable failures, in the face of God, and of the blessed company of all faithful people, as we unroll the spiritual excellences that lie enclosed within the treasure-house of the Church.

And, first, *Worship*.

Worship is a moral activity of the soul. And the Church, in her possession of a typical form of worship, necessarily evokes special moral activities. What are these? That is our question. And, to answer it, we must ask first, What is the character of the worship which kindles and moulds them? According to that character will be the spiritual type that results.

Now, the peculiar worship of the Church marks the point at which the differences between those who hold to the essentiality of the Church, and those who do not, reach their extreme acuteness. We may dispute about the validity of Orders, as if it were a purely technical detail. But, in truth, the question of Orders is but the superficial index of a deep

divergence in method, in mind—a divergence in the conception of worship itself. Any one who passes from the type of assembly where Apostolic Orders are regarded as immaterial, to one where they are conceived as essential, knows that he has not merely crossed the line of a legal or technical difference, but has changed one mental atmosphere for another, has passed from one spiritual climate to another. Motive, aim, type, tone, all are altered.

Now, what is the vital secret of this obvious difference? How put it into words? For herein must lie the key to the divergence of moral character that will result.

Of course, I do not mean that the difference will be absolute. Thank God, the Unity of the Lord's Person, in which we all believe, can hold together the divided aspects in which we regard Him ; and each type of worship, therefore, will probably include something of the motives and tones of the other ; but the divergence will show itself in the contrast between the particular principle which dominates in the one, and the particular principle which dominates in the other.

What, then, is the spirit which dominates and pervades the worship of the Church, and

which is subordinate or hidden in the worship of those to whom the Church is of little account?

I think especially this—it is the spirit of a great Action. We who enter into such a Liturgy, find ourselves, as the Service proceeds, taken up into a scene, a drama, in which mighty things are happening. Not that it is a theatric display, to rouse our emotions; for it is not so much directed towards us as towards God. On Him it is bent. Upon Him it waits. For Him it calls. He is the Supreme Agent, Who is intimately concerned. And He is doing something, here and now, in our midst. He is expected; He will be here. God will work wondrously. It is an act to be enacted of God Himself. And we all stand round, as ourselves the scene of the act. We are the Church; the House into which He enters; the Place where He will set His Name; the Sanctuary which He has chosen; the Altar where He will do His mighty work. We are the Body, which He quickens and fills with His energetic Will, with His masterful Purpose. We are caught up into His Act, as fuel whereon the flame alights.

We, living creatures, are the Place of His appearance ; and therefore there is much, no doubt, to be done before He arrives ; much that concern ourselves. We have to be prepared, as soil for the seed. We have to break up the fallow ground with plough and harrow. We set to work upon our own selves. We purify our souls with the water of sprinkling. We confess our unworthiness. We plead. We are abashed. But all this is not primarily for the sake of the blessing and peace which it brings us, but rather in awe and fear at the awful entry that is being made. Hymns, litanies, prayers, look beyond us—beyond our personal comfort ; they aim at setting up the clear highway through the wilderness of the world, along which He Who comes may pass.

Such is our Church Service ; such is our Worship. Just as primitive faith, according to the Bishop of London's sermon, did not set itself to frame a suitable community on behalf of its own improvement, but is itself the discovery of a Holy Society already substantial and existent, into which, at its moment of birth, it has been received ; so now, in worship, the believing soul has not got to set

itself to invent an edifying form of service which will be convenient for its use in common with others who believe; but it discovers that an agelong act of worship is for ever proceeding—an eternal deed being unceasingly rehearsed; done high in heaven, round about the throne, in that abyss of light where the thunder of an immortal music pulses round a Lamb that has been slain; and done, again and again, here on earth, continually reasserting, in its sequent recurrence, for the generations that come and go, the efficacy of the one, pure, perfect, and sufficient Sacrifice.

That is the Church's worship; that is the mighty Thanksgiving; that is the awful Eucharist; that is the action done within the whole body of the faithful, as within a temple, knit stone by stone into a living habitation for God. Thither He comes. He enters in, and abides, and sups with us. We are made one with God, and God with us, through Jesus Christ, our Victim, Priest, and King. And the main effort of the believing soul that has found its way in thither, lies in identifying itself with the mystery, in surrendering itself to the power of this Divine action.

Such is the typical form of the Church's worship, and such a type has never been preserved except within those bodies of Christians who hold on to the Apostolic Order of the Church.

Such a worship has two special notes, bearing on the character of spiritual life which it encourages. First, as based on action, it appeals directly to the Will of the man. A Divine exertion of Will, put out in the offering of Jesus Christ once for all, is the centre and core of the scene. And this calls upon the will of the worshipper to respond. Our success in worship depends on the degree with which we can identify our will, our active consent, with the thing done by God in our midst. It is not our reason only which is to be satisfied by a theoretical justification of God's ways, or by a harmonious interpretation of His methods; not our imagination which is to be moved by a beautiful ideal; not our emotions which are to be stirred by pathetic or impassioned appeals. All these may be needed, but these are all mere accessories, not principals. The most moving sermon, the most orthodox creed,—these are only assistants to the will in achieving its act

of worship. They enable it, they propel it, they direct and control it. But the soul has only accomplished its worship when the whole man has come forward with a resolute act of adherence to the work done for it and in it by the power of God; when the man, with everything in him, has added his voice in assent to the blessed Purpose; has yielded himself up, in his fulness of intention, to the movement of the eternal Decision; and has, in clear and hearty co-operation with the Spirit, uttered, in company with angel and archangel and with all the hosts of heaven as they bow themselves in one consistent wave of adoration, his own personal "Amen; Alleluia!"

"Amen, Amen; Alleluia!" The spirit of all our worship lies in that—in agreeing with God; in laying our will in God's Will; in setting our spirits in tune with His Spirit; in saying "Amen!" to what He does. Worship is the "Alleluia!" which joyfully assents. And such a heartfelt agreement with the counsels of God, revealed in the cross and victory of Jesus Christ, should act as a directive rule of temper and mind.

First, it sets up a fixed standard, deter-

mining all our efforts at prayer or praise. That standard is God's own act done in Christ. The worship of the Church looks toward God, is directed toward God. Its final purpose is not man's edification, but God's glory. And that glory consists in man's uttered assent to God's goodness and wisdom. Its rightness is measured by the freedom and the joy with which our willing consent goes forth from us, as we sing, "We praise Thee, we worship Thee, we glorify Thee, we give thanks to Thee for Thy great glory. For Thou only art holy; Thou only art the Lord; Thou only, O Christ, with the Holy Ghost, art most high in the glory of God the Father. Amen! Alleluia!"

Now, such an aim, fixed before us, makes the Church's public worship the goal of all our religious and moral life. We live in order to learn how to make perfect our joyful assent. Our private prayers at our bedside, our entire effort at devotion, is bent on bringing our nature into harmony with that Divine action which it is our privilege to recognize and to praise. We wrestle with our stubborn wills, we struggle against our climbing sins, we beat off our assailing temptations, not only to win

peace for ourselves, not only to be sure of salvation, not only as lonely pilgrims traveling dangerous paths; but with a distinct object beyond all this, with an inspiring duty laid upon us—the object, the duty, of adding our voice in richer volume, in higher freedom, to the worship that goes up before God in the great Congregation. On us it depends how far heaven will be filled with His praise; how far the living stones of His temple will cry “Hosanna!” at His coming. Each congregation has this task set it—of making itself a home of Thanksgivings, an altar of Eucharists. And each member of the congregation has it in him to deaden or to quicken that Eucharistic Act; to stifle or to liberate that voice of public Thanksgiving. Here, surely, is a motive that lends dignity and supplies hope to our private devotion and to our moral conduct.

And now we may notice the second point which distinguishes the worship of the Church, namely, that it is our entire manhood which it summons to the act, in all its several faculties. Worship becomes not merely the cry, the effusion, the ecstasy of the spirit alone; but the goal, the climax of all those capacities, mental and bodily, which are known as secular.

Primarily, no doubt, worship is an act of will ; the will is the real instrument of worship. But the will draws upon all the collected powers and faculties of the man to assist it in this its supreme endeavour.

And, first and foremost, it appeals for succour to that faculty which stands so high, so near the throne—that faculty which has so often overwhelmed man by its brilliancy and daring until he has suffered himself to allot it the supremacy, and to seat it in the chair of government—the faculty of Reason.

Wherever man has given to reason this prerogative, he has done it to his spiritual ruin. For the harmony of man's being is broken when once the will is displaced from the centre. In the will lies the man himself.

But, granted that the will is the prime agent, man's immediate, instantaneous, instinctive need is to summon the reason to his help. His demand is imperative that the reason should set to work to interpret and justify the Divine deed to which the will desires to adhere. That deed has infinite issues, and eternal significance, and ever-varied applications. And the reason will fulfil its part in the thanksgiving, and contribute its force to the "Amen"

"So be it," according to the measure of the zeal with which it has entered into the open mystery, and has detected its significance, and unravelled its consequences, and harmonized its multiplicity of application, and so brought the entire mind of the worshipper into correspondence with the drama to which he gives his adoring consent.

It is here that a Creed shows itself as a chief factor in right worship. The worship must be in spirit and in truth—in correspondence, that is, with God's reality. Worship is the loving identification of man's will with God's Will, so that they move along the same lines towards the same goal. The Creed is the expression of this identification. It brings the man's intellectual and conscious assent into line with the working of the Divine purpose. Always, therefore, at the heart of the Church's adoration, comes the rehearsal of the Creed, attesting that man's thought tallies with his will, that his consciousness goes along with his acts and his desires.

The Creed is often spoken of as if it were an offence to the intellect, as if it put it into fetters. But, in truth, the Creed is the free charter of human thought, for it embodies its claim to

be concerned with the highest spiritual act of which man is capable, *i.e.* the worship of God. It is the assertion that thought cannot be omitted from such an act, but is an essential and vital element in its right fulfilment. Man has been exalted to consider and to understand what he is doing, as he holds communion with the Most High. It is to be no blind effort of dumb emotion, but is a comprehensible purpose, freely and intelligently achieved.

But let us note this. A Creed demands a Church. Such an intellectual consciousness of what he is about in this tremendous act of worship can only have been attained by a prolonged and concerted effort of the entire worshipping body. No single member of it could have worked out the full meaning. The Church worshipped as a body; and therefore, as a body, it arrived at the conscious expression of its worship. Under the sharp and pressing discipline of five hundred years, it did attain to saying, "This is my worship; this is what I mean; this is what I adhere to; to this I give my consent. This is the real significance of my intention, as I send up before God my 'Amen; Alleluia!' I, the Church of God, mean that I, in all my members,

believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth ; that I believe in Jesus Christ, His only begotten Son ; that I believe in the Holy Ghost, the Lord and Giver of life ; that I believe in the Holy Catholic Church ; the Communion of Saints ; the Forgiveness of sins ; the Resurrection of the dead, and life everlasting. Amen, Amen ; Alleluia ! ”

The Church's worship calls upon the intellect, then ; and it calls also upon all the other capacities in like manner to assist. The imagination has its office and place close by that of reason. It must uphold the will, as it moves forward to embrace the Divine counsel. It must open out the splendid vision ; it must make it manifest in its height, and depth, and length, and breadth. It must clothe it with flesh and blood, in colour and warmth and glory. The will, weak, trembling, shrinking, setting forth in awe and fear upon its tremendous task of coalescing with the Will of God in Christ, feels about for all that can encourage and enhearten it, for all that can hold it loyal to its aim, for all that can inspire it with confidence and hope. And the imagination, with its sense of beauty, is here its most trusted helpmeet, its tenderest and

truest companion. The imagination surrounds it with images and omens of that which it desires to attain. It feeds it with lovely sights and sounds. It encircles it with sweet breathings of musical passion; it lifts it with trumpet-tones; it fills it with song, as with new wine. It fastens its eyes on the glow of pictured scenes. It enfolds it within glorious walls, as within a splendid cathedral, whither it may escape from the strife of tongues, and the glare of dreadful daylight—may escape into the silence of solemn sanctuaries, and gather in new force under the beneficence of aisle and nave and choir, as under the overshadowing wings of the angels of God. This is the work of art; and always, wherever the Catholic ideal of worship, based on the will, has prevailed, there it has found a sacred ministry for art.

So all the separate elements of the man minister at the Altar, and serve each in its gift to enrich the hearty fulness with which his entire personality contributes its "Amen" to God's action. Not only the high faculties of reason and imagination, but all the lighter crowd of capacities that build up his nature; all are welcome, for all can lend force to his assent. Hearing, and touch, and smell, and fancy,

and even humour—everything that is healthy and natural and sane—can help forward the act of worship. The Church admits them all within its walls. Yet still—let us recall it—these are but assistants. They can co-operate, they can fortify; they can encompass. But the nerve of worship is always the will. It is the will which adores, and draws all these other faculties in its train.

And this leads us to fasten on the one supreme note of all true worship; and that is holiness. Holiness,—goodness of character and conduct,—this and worship run together to one root, for both run down into the will. Both are one thing. They express the same will in two directions. Worship is the conformity of the human will to God's Will in glad adoration. Goodness is that same conformity as it appears in tone and action. Whether in worship or in righteousness, the essence of each is the assent of the innermost heart of the man to the judgment of God. It is the saying "Amen; Alleluia!" Said in prayer and praise, it is worship; said in deeds, it is goodness. So inseparably are the two combined. Once rest worship on the will rather than the feelings or the reason,

and it must follow that holiness is worship, and worship is holiness. Therefore it is that the prophets, the strong champions of the Sabbath worship and of the Temple service, burn with passionate zeal for the holiness of heart that can alone justify sacrifice or meat-offering. It is because they care so much for the ritual of the sanctuary that they can identify it with visiting the widows in their affliction, and keeping one's self unspotted from the world. It is because they desire so strenuously that God should be pleased with the sacrifice of righteousness, with the burnt-offerings and oblations—because they would offer young bullocks upon His altar—that they would first bring before God the true sacrifice that He requires, the sacrifice of a troubled spirit, of a broken and contrite heart. It is because Samuel is the great sacrificer that he can protest with such vehemence, "Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams." The two motives hang inevitably together. For one self goes out in both.

And so it is, beloved, that we are not surprised at the terrible moral austerity of the words of my text, in which the vast "Alleluia!" of heavenly adoration goes up before

the throne, entwined with the awful recognition of God's judgment on the great whore which did corrupt the earth. "Salvation, and glory, and honour, and power," they sing, "unto the Lord our God." And why? "Because true and righteous are His ways." Because He is a Judge, terrible and strict. Because He avengeth Himself on sin. Because He will by no means spare the guilty. That is the stern temper of worship, laying itself open to the God Who is, in His hatred of evil, a consuming Fire. That is the Catholic worship, which can only send up its incense-cloud of praise according to the loyalty with which it can surrender its own sin to the flame of God's judgment. In giving glory to God, it declares its severance from guilty Babylon.

Worship and holiness, therefore, spring from one root. The Church, which is the home of worship, is known as the Holy Catholic Church.

And yet there are men who can talk as if the high Liturgy of the Church offered an external form as an equivalent before God of an inward goodness, and who really imagine that they are attacking sacerdotalism by

declaring that they would rather be pure within than keep a million of rubrics. As if any one could doubt it! As if any sane sacerdotalist could possibly disagree! As if the competition were conceivable between purity and rubrics to any but a hopelessly diseased conscience! And who could be more fierce and more vehement against such a diseased conscience than the sacerdotalist whose entire belief is undermined by such a desperate perversion? Surely, no loudness of declamation can condemn the conscience which hopes to keep its sin by dint of keeping rubrics, half so weightily or so severely as the very Liturgy which the soul is miserably profaning. Every rubric, so kept, records a fatal judgment against his soul. He is coming before God with a lie in his right hand.

My brethren, for us there is no such self-deceit possible. We cannot dream of there being any antithesis between an outer Liturgy and an inner life. We are only concerned with their intimate correspondence, with their community of origin, with their mutual co-operation. Each responds to the other. Every act in the Liturgy forces forward an incessant demand for righteousness; for to

come before God in the decencies of His sanctuary, is to offer our innermost being to His scrutiny. On the other hand, any good deed done in God's Name is an act of adoration ; a pure life offered and dedicated is itself a Liturgy.

You and I, my brethren, fall under this law of worship. Every approach to the sanctuary pledges us anew to inner conformity to the mind and judgment of God. And therefore our joyful awe in worship will always have about it a terror. We are recognizing with our "Amens" a God Who judges the great whore. We have a sense of the smoke that rises from our own sins, consumed in that sinful city that lies under the wrath of God. And very humbly, and with trembling shame, and with the tears of penitence still wet on our cheeks, we shall listen to the mighty thunders that mingle with the song of the thousand times ten thousand, and shall dare to murmur our "Alleluia!" "Just and true are Thy ways ; true and righteous are Thy judgments!" "Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth !"

How solemn it is ! God is indeed Love ; but it must always remain a serious affair, a dreadful thing, to come before the living God. God is

Love; and Love is jealous, and Love makes high demands; and he who loves, must of necessity keep the commandments. "Hereby we do know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments;" "If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth;" "In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God;" "Whosoever is born of God doth not sin; . . . and he cannot sin, because he is born of God." That is the message of the Apostle of Love, who has given us the vision of the Heavenly Liturgy. That is the one rule of all our worship. It means holiness of heart, or it means nothing. Nay! worse than nothing; for it means the witness to our condemnation. God, of His own pity and power, deliver us who worship in His Church, from bringing ourselves under that most dire condemnation!

IV.

LIFE IN THE CITY.

“That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith ; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height ; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God.”—
EPH. iii. 17-19.

REVEREND FATHER IN GOD, BRETHREN OF
THE CLERGY,

Our belief in the Holy Catholic Church is no idle and formal assertion of the expediency of some external organization for the Christian Society, any more than our belief in the State merely asserts the practical necessity of an executive government and of a system of police. In this latter case we know where we are. We are being taught, through secular affairs, exactly what we most need to learn about the Church in spiritual matters. Science, philosophy, and history have all conspired

together to dismiss, with ridicule, the petty individualism which used to ascribe to the organization of the secular State a purely external and regulative function. We are being shown how radically contrary it is to all the deepest instincts and motives of human nature to pit "the man against the State," or "the State against the man," as if they were two contrasted forces, working in opposition the one to the other. Rather they are seen to be the two correlative factors of a single process which we call civilization. Each presupposes the other; each plays into the other. The conscious individuality of the man is, itself, the creation, the product of an organized society. Its vitality, its robust vigour, is a witness, not against the State, but on the State's behalf; for only in and through the organic State can the individual attain to such vigorous self-assertion; and his vigour, therefore, becomes the measure of the degree to which State organization can afford to proceed. A weak individuality permits only of a weak State; it sinks under the strain of a higher development. But the stronger the individuality, the better it can afford to perfect its social organization; which again, by its

new demands and fresh opportunities, will foster and evoke a further growth of the individual personality. The two advance together ; and we may notice that it is the enormous force which Christianity has thrown into the personal conscience which has made it possible for the modern organization of civilized society to go far beyond anything contemplated by the pre-Christian States of Greece or Rome.

This, then, is our secular lesson ; and it has come upon us like an inspiration, for it has disclosed the deep roots by which our personal existence draws its very life out of the soil of human fellowship. It has restored to us the strong and ancient motives that have, ever and always, underlain the appeals of a common nationality ; the cry of the patriot and the hero ; the voices that bind us within the oath of queen and country. It has revived into fresh influence and efficiency the moral qualities, the moral obligations, that had vanished out of our ken while we were still pottering over the shallow dilemma which isolated "the man" from the society in which alone he found his true worth and meaning and solution.

My brethren, as we consider the situation, may we not call it providential that we had

been guided, by the merciful anticipation of God, to revive, under the impulse of the great Church movement of the last fifty years, our belief in the Holy Catholic Church, so that we might be ready to receive this new secular knowledge that is now pouring in from every side? Let us ask ourselves—Where should we have been to-day, if we had had to face this new social aspiration after a larger and profounder brotherhood of man with nothing but that dry and mean conception of the Church which regards it as totally unessential to the soul; a formal and accidental arrangement for purposes of decency and police; a temporary encumbrance to the free movements of the spirit, made necessary by human imperfections and irregularities? How small such an ideal would have looked, in the eyes of the younger generation, immeasurably overtopped by the ethical splendour of their secular vision! All the noblest natures would have recognized, in our poor pleas for the religious isolation of the individual soul, the very positions which had been triumphantly ousted in the domain of social and political philosophy; and they would have swept our Christian faith up

wholesale into that larger condemnation which had overtaken all the kindred economical formulæ which had already proved themselves morally inadequate to satisfy the deeper human needs. Thus would have arrived one of those deadly crises, when the upward-striving conscience of the best men of the day, finding nothing to respond to its demand in the normal temper of the Christian body, would have wandered off into some passionate and violent protest, such as witnesses to a disappointment which is as cruel as it is unmerited.

Yes! the conception, the reality, the vital eminence of the Church—this alone can satisfy hearts which have long ago left behind the narrowness of individualistic ethics, and are longing to realize the larger responsibilities of a Catholic fellowship. On every side of us we recognize the working of this new leaven, so that it has become impossible for any religious body whatever to survive or to succeed without using the language and ideals of a Church. The days of particularism are gone.

Such is the secular teaching which has revived the deep principle which the Church exists to assert, namely, that a strong society means strong individualities. That is the root-law of

our ethics. That is the key to our moral position, both in State and in Church.

Wherever the society overbears, by its weight, the personalities which compose it, there the society itself is weak. It is undermining its own energy ; it is surrendering its own life. For it itself is no rival of the individual. On the contrary, it exists in the individuals ; its aim is to feed, nourish, enhearten them. The higher their energy rises, the stronger becomes its own vitality ; the richer its possibilities ; and the vaster its range.

The standard measure, therefore, of a Church's welfare lies in the moral force of the individuals whom it tends to produce. A rich and strong personality—that is the very base of the Church's ethical temper ; that is the proper outcome of her labour.

Now, my brethren, somehow, whether in defence or in attack of the Church, this gets forgotten. We drop into talking as if the value of the Church's action all lay in repressing, restraining, curtailing individual liberty ; in confining or opposing private judgment. The attack rails bitterly at the tyranny which overrides the personal thought, or will, or conscience. The defence claims that such

repression, such discipline, such restraint, is salutary and essential against the chaotic violence of disordered individuality. Both assume that they have to deal with two opposing parties, whose interests necessarily collide, and that the problem of life lies in discovering how to strike a balance between them, which will prevent their mutual intrusion on each other's ground.

Yet the whole of such language, as we have seen, rests on a false antithesis. It has misjudged the situation. It is blundering and belated. It misses all the point. The claim we make on behalf of the Church is not that it needfully represses the individual conscience and private judgment, but that it supplies them with the glory of freedom. It releases them into wider exercise, into fuller authority. The individual, we assert, is not free so long as he is alone. He attains freedom, as in the earthly, so also in his heavenly citizenship, by society with his fellows. If his faith in Jesus, springing out of the very roots of his natural social being, is itself corporate, and holds in it the seeds of a spiritual society, then he must have a Church in order to liberate and realize his inner structural type.

Of course, such a work of liberation involves the discipline of self-restraint. All fellowship makes demands of this kind ; and the Church is, in that sense, a severe mistress, whose schooling is long and often painful. But that schooling is not the end, but the means ; and the end of it all is still, not the keeping under of a dangerous force, but the release, the expansion, of a welcome ally. The effect of the schooling should always be that the private conscience grows more and more self-reliant, the private judgment more and more confident and sure and spontaneous. We ought to discover, under the discipline, how masterful are the powers and capacities of the individual soul, succoured and encouraged and sustained by such favourable fellowship. Under no other conditions but these does it taste its true gladness, or possess itself of its highest courage. And the Church should rejoice in such evidence of individual vitality, even as a loving mother watches, with smiles of thanksgiving, the free force of her growing children.

An instance will illustrate what I mean. Take our individual use of reason. The Church assumes that as no man lives to himself, but is a member of a body, therefore his

use of his reason cannot be merely a private and personal affair of his own, but that in its exercise he owes responsibilities to the body to which he belongs. By wrong-thinking he hurts, not himself only, but also the society, just as by his wrong-doing he damages the vital energy of the body as well as his own. The Church, therefore, meets him at this point with a dogmatic Creed.

But is his intellectual keenness to be lowered or stifled by the use of that Creed? If it is, the Church has failed of her intention. Her purpose is to fortify by the Creeds his thinking powers. His reason, encompassed about with the splendid impulse and direction of the dogmatic Creeds, far from falling back, idle and impotent, to let its thinking be done for it by another, should feel itself roused and kindled in all its intellectual faculties. Here, in this Creed, are mighty wonders laid open to it. Here are vistas which stretch away into eternity. Into such a palace of holy truth is it invited, where it may walk, and gaze, and love, and give thanks. A Creed is a call on the believer to think. It sanctions the exercise of reason on the things of God and on His Christ. It summons one and all to the task,

to the effort. "Your intellect is redeemed!" so it cries to us. "It is within the sanctuary. Use it, then; look around; search; examine; understand all you can. Your Creeds were built up under the stress and pressure of anxious intellectual exercise. You cannot profess them without yourself rising to their level, yourself undergoing some such kindred strain. You do not believe a Creed in order to be saved trouble, but in order to share in the honour and the pain of a mighty labour—the labour of entering, with mind and imagination, into the deep things of God. Think it over; think it out! Your reason is owed to the Cross as well as the flesh. You gain, not lose, the right to reason, and be heard, and to speak, on the faith, by your loyal adherence to that body which itself thought out, under the guidance of the quickening Spirit, the fabric of the Catholic Creeds." It insists, no doubt, that all such thinking is a matter of serious awe, for it is done by the man in his character of member in a witnessing body, responsible for its committed deposit, for which he must answer before the Throne of God, and to the Lord of the Church. This intensifies his responsibility; but, then, it also

increases his authority. His private judgment, which in itself, in its loneliness, is so petty and doubtful and limited and unsteady, is now taken up, and justified, and given fuller play, and endowed with new courage. He has an unction from the Holy One; he, in his measure, is one who may know all things. His private thoughts are now become sacred things; of real worth in the eyes of the Master Who anointed them, and consecrated them to the use of His Body, the Church. Let him think, therefore, in fear; but in the fear of an overpowering gladness, stirred into activity by the stimulating sense of his high calling in Christ Jesus.

So, again, with the private conscience. The Church recognizes the social character of private sin. The whole body suffers through the damage of the member; therefore it lays open to the soul a public mode of reparation for the wrong done in the body. Its officers are charged with the oversight of this reparation; they receive the penitent soul's confession, as made in face of the entire society unto God; they pledge to it its full restoration to the peace of the Church.

But if any part of this administration tends to deaden, or weaken, or sap the individual

conscience that comes within its scope, then, again, the Church is balked of her intention. Her intention must always be to brace, to quicken, to develop, the private conscience, through the consciousness of its large responsibilities to the society. Such a conscience, brought out into the daylight of its splendid fellowship, acting under the eyes of God, and before all the companies of the angels, ought to win nerve and fibre, as a warrior in the great arena. It runs the race set before it, as charged with awful issues of life and death to many beside itself. It is covered with a deeper shame if it fall ; but it is summoned back to a more heroic task by its renewal into grace. Such a discipline, gravely taken, should have but one result—to make it tougher, steadier, braver ; more aware of its high calling, more conscious of its unconquerable hope, more resolutely committed to the light. It should become ever better able to rely on its own grace-aided forces.

The dignity, the value of the individual life—this should be the true message and gift of the Church. The idea of the Church raises the personal existence to a higher power, and so evokes in it a fuller ethical temper.

And it does this, first, by supplying a background, deep and strong and vivid, to the transitory passage of the single soul across the scene. Not naked, not alone, does the pilgrim-soul travel, in the heat of its spirit. And therefore it can be tender and quiet in its exaltation ; it can be cheered and soothed in its depression. It need not violently fling itself away, either off some pinnacle of the temple, in its hour of spiritual passion, in the extravagance of its haste to prove that God is with it ; nor yet, again, in the anguish of a recoil, when failure looms and its inner faith quails. No ; its religion is not carried on within the heated arena of its own spectacular experience. It sees before and after. Far, far back behind it, the cloud of witnesses stretch ; far, far ahead, lies the promise of those that shall follow. Thousands upon thousands have known the fire of the inspiration which quickens our souls into prophecy to-day. We are only joining their company who still live in the unity of the one Body, and still pray and hope and give thanks with us, in the one Lord Christ. Thousands upon thousands will take up that same task, as it drops from our weak hands to-day ; they will take it

up, unspoiled by our impotence, unspotted by our sin. And we shall live at last with them; for we and they are made one in that undying Church which labours at one continuous work, accumulating efforts, gathering resources, recovering lost ground, concentrating powers, expanding a kingdom, with an organized impulse, with an unbroken vitality, from the Day of Pentecost until His coming again.

Ah! how calm, how untroubled, how uncomplaining we may be, when we resign our labours, and see the work pass out of our hands, and know that the doom is on us; that others shall take our place—the place that we have loved so dearly, because it was so good, so right, so holy, so hopeful, yet the place which must know us no more! How impossible to fret and fume, in feverish haste, lest all the opportunities that we so clearly see should be missed for God's glory! Has He not others, then, who serve Him? Are we so necessary? Can nothing go on without us? Will all be lost if we be taken away? Oh! be patient, be at peace, be still! You are but one tiny soldier in a mighty army! Do your own little part well, and leave the rest, and never

fear lest your Captain cannot spare you from your post.

Such thoughts, beloved, are not, of course, peculiar to a Church, but they are inseparable from it. It is impossible to be a true Churchman and not have them constantly reiterated. The Church vivifies them by making them cease to be merely moral reflections and maxims; it incarnates them in living realities; it presses them in upon us with the warm and breathing force of a realized communion. It is not a visionary dream that we catch at. It is sealed to us in undoubted fact, in sober reality, as we eat of that one Bread of which all have partaken, and drink of that one Chalice, which is ever being refilled with that blessed wine which one and all drink new in the kingdom of heaven.

But the Church does not only ennoble individual life by endowing it with the dignity of a high pedigree, by marshalling it into the splendour of an ordered host. It dignifies it, also, by emphasizing and heightening the importance of the demands made on it for active co-operation. The Church is God's witness that He wants men to do His service on earth. It is His declaration that all His redemptive

work is to be done by and through men. Only so can His kingdom be extended, and the Passion of His Son verified and utilized. God's way out to men is through men. Men—living men—are to be His instruments, His weapons, His vessels. Dead material could not convey the gospel of Christ. It must move out in the shape of human souls whom it has vitalized and transfigured. Through men, to men,—that was the law of the Incarnation. From the one Man, through many men, to all men,—that is the motive-principle which builds the Church. Each new man brought in is at once put to the use of the witnessing body—that body which holds together the witness to Christ's redemptive manhood into one compact mass, solid, firm, steady, organic; that can move without breaking; can transfer its action from place to place, and yet preserve its continuity, its identity, its coherence. Such a body God prepared for Him. He planned its construction, so that this witness of men might not dissipate itself in irregular efforts of fitful fervour, but might be drawn together, and ordained, and arranged, and manipulated, as a quick and skilful and practicable engine ready to His hand.

A body! the most delicate, and sensitive, and unified of all engines,—that is what Christ needed to work with; that is what was prepared for Him by His Father. One body—to last through all the ages of His manifestation, mediating towards men the undeviating revelation of the one, true, only, and sufficient Sacrifice. In that body His honour is housed, and through it His glory works out its mission. And it is into this that the individual soul is built. Every soul baptized is brought within its range. Every soul that receives the laying-on of hands is endowed with the power of this mission—is committed to the organized work of witnessing in the body.

How thrilling, how tremendous! Does not every fibre and nerve of our being quiver in response to such a call? To be “in the Church,” means to be wanted by Christ for use in that busy house of His, where all talents and gifts are put to highest profit for the service of man and the honour of God. We ourselves become the living means to a great end; and all our inner salvation—our finding of Jesus—is seen, not to centre in ourselves, in our own gain, our own rescue, our own peace; but to lead out beyond itself; to have splendid issues

of unselfish wealth ; to have been our qualification for use and office, without which we could not be taken up, as workers with God, into that eternal husbandry whereby He sets Himself to win over the stubborn and thorny field of the world. Our eyes are taken off ourselves ; we are not absorbed in rehearsing our own experience, however blessed. We are caught up into the counsels ; we serve to widen the frontiers of the kingdom ; through us, correlated as we are, by joints and bands, into the articulated body, the Spirit of Christ can get abroad, can take a fresh step forward. We are become its vantage-ground from which it can again advance.

Oh that we were more quick to His touch, more ready for His needs, more serviceable in His ministry ! That should be the animating motive of a Churchman's life—a motive that should grow in intensity and force, as his inner life yields more and more to the inflowing power of redemption. It should become less and less conceivable, every day of his Christian career, that he should remain idle, self-satisfied, content with his own personal redemption.

Such a motive lends supernatural and overwhelming value to the individual life ; and yet, in proportion to the reality of the value which

it brings, it increases the temper of personal humility. For while the vastness of the hosts into whose ranks we are numbered endows our little place and use with such immeasurable glory, that very same vastness saves us from attaching undue importance to ourselves. We are needed by God, but we are not necessary to God. Is not this the root of all that is finest and most delicate in the character of the true soldier? He combines two opposite characteristics. "England wants me!"—that fires and ennobles him. "England can do perfectly well without me!"—that is the thought that purges him into beautiful modesty. This is the type that should govern the development of the Christian warrior. "I stand here for Christ; He asks it of me. He set me here. So precious am I in His sight. But there are thousands to take my place, who would do as well as I. Why, therefore, should I fret with hasty anxiety over myself and my success? Nay, though 'right dear in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints,' nevertheless I can refrain my soul, and keep it low, like a child that is weaned by its mother: yea, my soul is even as a weaned child."

And this leads, naturally, to a fresh note of

the ethical temper which the ideal of the Church should foster. The Church, as we see, is intended as God's instrument for converting the world. That is why its order and continuity and visible reality are so essential. It was constructed so as to hold together, and to direct, down all the centuries, the entire force of converting power which Christ had at His disposal, so that the one message might be securely delivered, and the one life maintained in unbroken succession. So long as we regard it merely as a means by which grace should reach individual souls, we may have much to plead for it, but we have not yet touched the strongest argument on its behalf. That begins when we face the problem, how is the invisible Lord in heaven to reach and gain this visible earth, as yet unsubdued to Him? It can only be through believers that He can touch unbelievers. Human mediation of some sort is a plain necessity. There must be men who form a channel between Him and His converts. The question is not, then, between mediator and no mediator, but between the regulated and massed mediation of a well-ordered Church, and the lower, desultory, accidental mediation of unattached individuals.

But if so, my brethren, with what pathetic pity, with what yearning desire, must the Church and the Churchman look out upon the unbelieving or sinning world! There it lies, outspread before us, the field of our proper labour, the goal of our effort. There is that "world" which the Spirit, lodged in the body, burns to convict, through us, of sin and righteousness and judgment. Far from our Churchmanship leading us to entrench ourselves in our own exclusive security; far from it provoking us to despise and insult those outside who are still given over to the godlessness of sin, every day that adds to our sense of happy privilege must fill us with new shame at our impotence to persuade others. Why do the godless, the indifferent, the ignorant, learn so little from us of our strength and of our joy? Why are they so little impressed with what we have to offer them? Surely, it comes from our miserable incapacity to convey to them the message committed to us. It is our condemnation that they prefer their own life to what they see of ours. For they, too, as much as we, are God's children—exiled, outcast, by wrong, but still His children, whom God so loves—loves in their sin—that "He sent His only

beloved Son, that all that believe in Him should not go on perishing, but should have eternal life." They are designed, all of them, for Him; they are capable of His service; they are susceptible of His love. Beneath and within all this body of sin, there lurks and works the witness of the child to the Father, and of the Father to the child. For them the only Son gave His life, that He might from His Cross draw all unto Him. He sees them, even through their shame, as sheep for His fold, as stones for His temple, as pearls for His crown. And all the glory and beauty and joy of the earth, now wasted by them in riot, is all His. He wants it; He works for it.

Alas! how lovable, this fallen humanity; how tragic its ignorance; how beautiful, even yet, its hope! And is it we who obstruct the gospel news; who hide the shining of His face from man? Do we, by our baseness, indeed stand between them and their God? Is it a priesthood of Satan that we fulfil—a priesthood that blocks the channels, and blackens the light, and holds God and man apart? Surely, if we were loyal to the blessings made ours, God would reveal Himself through us. They would recognize the Presence; they

would start at its approach; they would turn aside, as Moses, to see how it was that the bush of the desert, so dry and so thorny, burned with a strange flame, and was not consumed! For this end our Lord's last prayer was for such a bonded unity of witness in His holy Church, that it might force upon the world the conviction of its blunder, and that so even that wicked world might at last yield and break, and might know that the Father had sent Him.

Brethren, the rigid exclusiveness, which is essential to the Church if she is to preserve the deposit intact, as it was committed to her—if she is to transmit down the generations the pure Creed, and the sacramental life—ought never to cut her off in selfish aloofness from the large human world, which it is her primary office to redeem and transfigure. It is for that world that she guards her treasure; not for her own profit. It is due to humanity, as a whole, all of which has been bought by the ransom of the Cross, and awaits the quickening of our shielded Chalice. Our love, our tenderness, our sympathy, our compassion for that "world," should be sharpened and intensified. Ever we should live in the spirit of the cry of

the blessed Fatherhood : "Have I any pleasure in the death of the wicked? saith your God. Why will ye die, O house of Israel?"

And if this be our motive, we can understand one last note of the Church's temper—its long patience with the mixed good and evil of human nature, as we find it. In this, it is ever in direct collision with all forms of that theory, whether Montanist, Donatist, Pietist, or Puritan, which would confine the Church to the elect, or to the good. "The Church of Christ is composed of all who are sincere," said Bishop Hoadly, in the days of William Law. "Every one who is pure and good belongs to Christ's true Church," echo many voices now. How silly, how shallow, how inhuman, how sophistic! Who, then, are these good and pure people who form this Church? Who are to judge? They themselves? Nobody else can; but can they be trusted in their own cause? And would not their goodness be gone the moment they adjudged themselves to be good? Could any temper be more fatal to their purity than such self-consciousness would involve? Or are they good because they confess themselves sinners? But who can prize his penitence, and weigh it, and pronounce it adequate

to constitute him a member of Christ's Church? Or is it not a familiar truism that the good man is he who is not aware of his own goodness? And if so, he cannot be aware of his title to Churchmanship. So invisible is this Church, that the last people to see it or recognize it are the very people who constitute it! Those only can belong to it who do not know that they belong. If they were once to become conscious of it, they would damage their goodness, and so forfeit their title.

And, moreover, is the goodness of the good a permanent quality? Is it sure to last at its present level? And when it drops, do they lapse from their Churchmanship? and at what point of the drop? Must they, again, decide this? Are they to excommunicate themselves when they happen to think themselves bad enough? How, in the world, can such a definition of a Church bear to be applied to real life? Just conceive the complexities of the human conscience, and its strange ups and downs, and recoils, and reactions, and exaltations, and horrible deflections and aberrations; and all the subtle, intricate world of inner mingled motives, that rise and fall, and mix and weave, and meet and separate, and meet

again ! Ah ! what a pliable elastic film of mist, thickening only to dissolve, dissolving only to thicken again, would our "Churchmanship" become if it was identified with our goodness !

And, then, is there not, underlying this kind of phrase, an assumption that the Church consists only of the good and the pure and the strong ? It is their society, their club. But the Church is the Body of Jesus Christ. And Jesus Christ came, we know it well, not for the ninety and nine just men, but for the weak, the broken, the lost. Not for the whole, but for the sick, did the good Physician walk this earth. This is "the mind of Christ ;" and His mind must determine, throughout, the structure and constitution of the Church. It exists for the weak. It is a corporation which puts the strong at the service of the weak. It collects the pure and the true and the unselfish into a single organized mass with the laggards and the lapsing and the tempted and the fallen ; so that all the combined forces that make for good may be at the disposal of those who lack ; so that the best may buttress, and support, and lift, and carry along the worst ; so that the resources of Christ may be distributed over the whole surface as far as

possible, and the wealth of the saints be put to fullest profit. It welds us all together, so that by the leaven of the few the whole lump may be on the way to become leavened. This is our brotherhood in grace.

And as the Church does this in the mass, so also in each individual life. The Church pledges us to our best and purest moments; it holds us to them even when they have passed and dropped. Ah, how swiftly they pass—those moments when we are at our best; when our eyes are open; when our hearts are enlarged; when our souls are innocent and pure; when our spirits leap out towards God! Swift and rare—they pass and are gone! We sink back under the drag of old burdensome errors, of dull depression, of flat, stale, unprofitable days. Yes! but the Church is then our succour. Then is the time that it lays its arm about us; it upholds; it pulls us through. It has sealed us to God in the innocence of babyhood, in the glow of Confirmation, in the peace of Communion; and now it will not let us go. We are committed to it; it holds us fast. Now, through the dismal hour—now is its time. It keeps up its claim; it seals to us the reality of the blessed promises which once we trusted, and which now

we doubt. It assures us that, in spite of ourselves, we are still God's children. Though we lie dead as stones, hard and chill as iron, we are nevertheless of the household of God, of the Body of Christ. We may hold on ; we may endure, under the authority and benediction of the Church, until the evil spirit is taken away, and the sweet hour of spiritual joy creeps in once more upon our souls.

That is our Church's work. It is no clique of the select, but a house of healing and of redemption. It is our house and home still, even though we be prodigals in a far country ; so that, even amid the husks and the swine, we may still reclaim our rights ; still have courage to say, " In *my* Father's house ! " My Father's—mine still ! Not a house into which I shall be admitted when I am good ; but a house mine now, and by its grip upon me enabling me to become good again. A house not merely for elder brothers, that they may be feasted and ringed and robed ; but a house which demands of them the far higher task of welcoming home their returning brethren with dancing and with song.

The Church is a house of healing : it exists to save sinners. And it saves them, according

to the mind of Christ, by first forgiving them, and making them its own, while still sinners ; and by then requiring them to use this pledged pardon as a power by which to put away their sin. A slow, and intermittent, and unsteady, and painful process this after-work may be by which we put off the old man. And it is done inside the Church—after being admitted a member—through the redemptive energy of that merciful admission. We are made Christians in order to be able to work out the poison of our sin. This explains two points, upon which I must lightly touch before closing.

First, it explains the wide hopefulness with which the Church lays hands on huge masses of mixed humanity. It draws them all in ; it baptizes freely ; it pours out over them its splendid language of regeneration, though, indeed, there is little to correspond to its salutation. It invites ; it feeds ; it finally buries them in hope. For it sees in them what they may yet become. It sweeps them in within the range of Christ's sanctifying forces ; it rings them round with the plastic energies of His kingdom. It can wait and pray for the rest to happen ; always trusting that though the lump looks so sodden, the hidden leaven is

active within it; always trusting that the prodigal may recall the Father's house, with its hired servants, which is still his home. It justifies this trustfulness, this prophetic hope, by all that it reads of God's dealings with man in the old books of the prophets, or in the Epistles of St. Paul.

And, secondly, it explains what often puzzles those without—the penitential confession of sin uttered continually to the very end by those within the Church, pardoned in Christ. “Miserable sinners!” repeated in its dreadful monotony—is that, they ask, the voice of forgiven saints? Yes; that is just what forgiven saints are learning day by day to say, with more real and more bitter penitence. For it is after pardon, and in the light of forgiveness, that we first understand our sins, first realize their depth and strength and hideousness. We have been brought within the Church that, by her help, we may have force given us to undo our chains, to break our habits, to detect our weakness, to cast out our infamy. And oh, the weary work! how it lengthens, how it deepens; as the Holy Spirit leads us about with His lamp, and shows us all, so much blacker than we expected, so far fouler than we ever dreamed! Ah! the more

loyal we are to His guidance, the deeper grows our shame, the more abject our humiliation. And yet the very sight of the darkness, of the shadows, proves that we stand in the light. So there is still peace, still increasing assurance of love, as lower and lower we pour out our complaints, and learn, with a new reality, to confess ourselves "miserable sinners." The growth of our Churchmanship must always, then, involve a growth in penitence—a deepening of penitence. According to our penitence lies the measure of our spiritual advance within the life and peace of the Church.

Beloved! that is where we should rightly end our talks together. In penitence! Ah! blessed, blessed word—the innermost note of the Christian character! That is the buried root from which all the fairest flowers of grace spring. That is the gift of God, which is bitter in the mouth, but sweet as honey in the heart. Penitence! we cannot create it for ourselves. Alas, for the hardness of our stubborn souls! But there is a good Spirit lodged in God's house, the Church—He Who knits it all together in the bond of peace. That Spirit alone can soften and infuse and bedew our dry hearts, until in the

wilderness waters break out, and springs in the desert—the waters of our penitence, the springs of our outpoured confessions.

Pray we, one and all, to Him, that these days spent here together may have widened, by the honesty of our humiliation, the way a little for His fuller entry ; that they may have set free His efficacious grace, which flows out to those of a humble and a contrite heart ; that we may lie more open and discovered to His most wonderful coming ; that He may fashion us, as He only can, into something a little nearer to the likeness of Christ.

“Come, Thou Holy Spirit, come ;
• • • • •
Heal our wounds ; our strength renew ;
On our dryness pour thy dew ;
Wash the stains of guilt away :
Bend the stubborn heart and will ;
Melt the frozen, warm the chill ;
Guide the steps that go astray.”

THE METHODS OF THE
KINGDOM'S GROWTH.

I.

THE SOWER.

“Behold, a sower went forth to sow.”—ST. MATT. xiii. 3.

COULD any contrast be sharper than that between the countryman and the citizen, as they go out, each to his work?

Take the citizen. We Londoners know well the sight. How characteristic it is! The platform at Waterloo Station, or Liverpool Street, as the early trains run in from the suburbs; or Blackfriars Bridge between eight and nine in the morning. There is the citizen, going forth to his work and his labour until the evening. What a sight it is! There is no moment in all the day at which you can feel so vividly the pace, the intensity, the heat, the fury, of our competitive modern industry. It is the very rage of living that is at work here in these scurrying throngs. You

are conscious how fast the pulses of this vast human life are beating. Look at the swarms of hurried faces—how they press, how they squeeze along! Every face bent one way, they pour through the station gates over the roadway of the bridge. It is a host on the move, hurrying to their posts for the battle. A stranger from the country, suddenly thrust into these moving masses, might be alarmed at the rush, at the pace. Is it a fire from which they flee? Is it a revolution that has broken out? Is there a panic? What has happened, that these crowds all hurl themselves along in one fixed direction, pushing, crushing, herding, streaming? Round the corners they all are flocking; no one can stand still against the flood. And endless hordes are following hard behind—men, girls, boys, all helter-skelter in a mingled volume, in an irresistible mob. What is it?—what is up? the stranger might ask. Nothing at all! It is simply London going to its daily work. At five o'clock you will see it all turning home again—the same huddling, hurrying mass, turned back like a great tide, pouring down in the counter direction with the like haste, the like eagerness, the like torrent of human force.

How keen are the eyes! How quick the

movements! Not a moment to be lost on the way. The newspaper must be read as they walk. A glance down the columns takes in the facts for the day. Some eat their breakfast as they go. Some are already late, and are rushing on with desperation, as if the world would come to an end if they missed another minute.

And every day this is repeated with unfailing precision. Every morning the vast flood pours itself in from the suburbs, until the City is possessed and filled from end to end with its busy throngs, thick as ants that bustle and hurry in and through and about the living heap which is their home. Every evening the flood streams back, as with the noise of a mighty withdrawal. The choked trains drag themselves out, one after another, from the roaring stations. Minute after minute, they whistle, scream, and pass, pausing at every half-mile to discharge the black hordes of men from the offices, or the grey crowds of artisans who stand thick in the carriages. So it is that in London "man goeth forth to his work and to his labour until the evening." And all the time between, if you look in at the merchant houses, as the great doors swing to and fro, with the

incessant crowd that passes and repasses, you see the clerks bending over piles and piles of filed papers ; and their pens scribble and creak ; and the money clinks in the boxes of the cashiers ; and the messengers hurry in and hurry out ; and the customers strum with impatient fingers on the polished counters, demanding swift attendance ; and the telephone-bells give their eager signals ; and telegraph-boys are waiting ready for immediate service at any moment. And down in the cellars, or up in the attics, the men have their coats off, as they hurry to get through their business, hot, dirty, and ceaseless. That is "the City" as you and I know it.

And how strange to think in contrast of some far village, hushed in sleeping trees, where, in the dull dusk of morning, the slow figure of a peasant here and there creeps out from this or that sparse cottage door ! Blurred and dim, it moves with quiet motion, grey as the grey road along which it travels. It seems to mix with the formless wreaths of rising haze. Only as the daylight sharpens do the outlines of the human form make themselves clear. There he is ! Silently he passes, with dragging steps, through the still slumbering out-

houses, and down the pathway by the hedge. The sheep, already cropping the wet grass, look up for a moment and feed on; the cattle stand about in the white mist and gaze and never move. Only the birds start up here and there and chirrup. How unhurried it all is! How brooding! How peaceful! How steady! There is no fear that he will not be in time. He and the old Earth understand one another. She is there, waiting for him, in her silence; and he is aware of her, and knows it all, and need not speak. Quiet signs there are that pass between them; he takes note as he goes of what is proceeding. He marks the sky, and the clouds, and the promise of the day; he knows by wordless instinct what is before him. Bit by bit, he slowly settles to his job. He feels his tools; he arranges himself for the long day. He will be alone, perhaps, from morn till night; he will bend there over the roots; he will shift the hurdles for the sheep. Rain and sun and wind will pass over him, and as they found him, so will they leave him. Birds will sing above him; little animal movements will rustle round him; a dog, perhaps, will lie watching his coat as he works. Still he will plod on through the lengthening

hours. At midday he will sit under the hedge with his lunch, and think to himself. Once or twice in the day he may hear a voice, and exchange a greeting. The farmer may look in, and have a word to say. So it will pass, until the sun sinks without a sound, and the shadows creep over the fields; and the rooks circle against the evening sky; and a bell booms here and there; and a dog barks far away; and he gets his things together, and draws home, with his tools over his shoulder, to where the village already darkens under its quiet elms. So, all over this English country, does man "go forth to his work and to his labour until the evening."

What a contrast! And the contrast goes deeper than the outward appearance. It tells upon the character of the worker. The citizen, with his eager movement, with his keen eyes, demands rapid and positive results from his work. He looks for quick returns. He abhors waste—waste of time, waste of opportunity, waste of labour. Everything is calculated with a view to a direct practical issue. The books are incessantly made up with exact and rigid precision. He is bent on making everything pay its way, on turning everything

to profit. He knows well that the road to wealth lies in getting more use out of given material than other men can get. And he is racing with a crowd of alert competitors to beat the record in this particular fashion. His interest is set on working up into some profitable shape the residuum of stuff which others leave to waste. The entire intelligence of the trade is bent on reducing this residuum, on wasting nothing. And the completest success lies with the man who can do this in the rapidest manner ; who can see his profits come back to him quickest ; who can intensify the pace with which he makes his turn-over ;—the man, in short, who wastes the least stuff and the least time. Waste is the sin. Pace in arriving at direct and positive profits is the virtue of the city worker.

But, in the country, the man is co-operating with a vast system of Nature which he cannot bring under his control, or force into definite grooves. He must make his venture, and then leave it to slow, silent, unseen, incalculable processes to work out for him. The round earth turns on its way with varying fortunes. He can but dimly correspond with its manifold changes. So he is accustomed to see all his

hopes upset, and to stand by and watch at their ruin without the power to act in his own defence. Sometimes more, sometimes less, he may expect to reap from his exertions, but it largely lies outside his own effort to say which it shall be. Nor has he any great possibility of advance in profit or in pace. On and on the seasons come and go: one a little better, another a little worse. He can but travel along with them, repeating year by year the old, old round of labour, moving patiently from point to point, as ploughing, and seed-time, and hay-time, and wheat-harvest, and autumn ingathering, and winter fallow-time recur in their ancient rhythm. He moves with the moving whole, part and parcel of the quiet scenery; content to renew his old ventures, in spite of many a disappointment; content in patience to gather what he may into his barns, not repining at what he has lost by the way, sturdily thankful for the residue that is reaped and stored, rescued from the perils of storm or drought or flood. He must always allow for waste. His virtues are patience, and trust, and pathetic endurance.

Now, our Lord had something to say, in His parables, on the city life. He saw in it a distinct

parallel to the work of the kingdom of heaven. The kingdom would bear a likeness to a banker's house, or a great merchant's establishment. There would be in it the busy activity as of clerks poring over the ledger. And our Lord expresses a strong desire to have on His side the keen desire for rapid results, as part of the temper which He would put to use in His service. He needs those who would turn five talents into ten, and two into four. He demands to have His own brought back to Him with interest.

But, in His main set of parables, it is, we know, in the labour of the country that He sees the form and fashion of this kingdom which He has come to found. And I beg you to observe that it is in order to justify the mixed and doubtful returns of the kingdom of heaven that He turns to the industry of the country for a parallel.

For this is the melancholy fact to be faced. The kingdom of heaven will not work out its affairs with clear, orderly precision. It will not be able to bring all its efforts spent under the thumb of careful calculation, to be summed up in double entry, to be swiftly and exactly replaced by the profits they bring in.

No! very slow, very hesitating, very chequered, will be its successes. Its good will have to be taken with its evil. Its ventures will never have more than a mingled story of weal and woe. And there will be, of necessity, such waste by the way! Such dismal waste! So much must be done on God's side which will come to nothing, which will win no response, which will fall to the ground unprofitably, which will seem to be merely thrown away—risked and lost. Ah, such dreary mishaps that will overtake good hopes! Such misadventures, such sterilities, such unfortunate interventions of evil, such curtailments, such qualifications! So much damage that will have to be accepted, to be borne with; while God stands by, watching His own work being spoilt by hostile agencies—stands by, without protest; without anger; in silence. And there will be such ever-recurring work, to be done all over again, begun and begun time after time! And still, and always, at each recurrence, the same sort of unhappy element of failure, of accident, of waste, will repeat itself with haunting persistence. Sometimes better, sometimes worse; yet always some loss, some damage, some waste.

So the kingdom of heaven will look.

So it does look to us to-day, my brothers. And can anything be more staggering to our faith than such an aspect? This is what fills us with dismay, to find God's work so mixed, so uncertain, so incalculable, so irregular, so chequered, so flecked with disappointment! Such waste of Divine gifts there seems; such waste of the Father's bounty! So much spent; such energy poured out; all the Cross and Passion; all the life-blood of the Son; all the fulness of grace; all the splendour of the Spirit; all the wealth of the Church! And yet with such poor results, for such scanty returns; with so much good work thrown helplessly away; often with such ignominious conclusions! How puzzling, how distressing! How unlike what we should expect of God!

Yes! unlike what *we* should expect; but not at all unlike what Christ expected, the Founder of this kingdom, Who spent Himself so abundantly for it. He foresaw it all. And, so foreseeing, for a justification, for an analogy, He pointed our eyes to the patient, plodding, cumbered industries of plain country-folk. There, in the country, where man and nature

mix their plaintive labours,—there you will see and understand God's methods.

Look! there goes a sower. He goes out to sow his seed. A good, a hopeful, a benignant work. God's blessing be on it! Yes! but watch him. The first thing you note about him, if you follow him, is that, as he sows, some seed falls by the wayside, on the hard-trodden path; and in a moment the quick-eyed birds have noted the yellow grain lying idle and exposed, and have swooped down, and carried it off and devoured it. That seed has been wasted.

And lo! another handful has fallen, as he scatters it, on ground where the soil lies thin upon the secret rock. It may make a brilliant start, that seed; but it cannot drive its roots in. It has no depth, and when the sun beats hot upon it, it will wither away. It, too, has been wasted.

Yet again watch him, as he sways and swings with the throw of the scattering arm. A whole flight of seed has dropped among weeds and thorns; and they will spring up faster than it, and will seize its soil and choke it out. That, too, will come to nothing.

Only a fourth part of his labour finds its

reward. Some there is that meets its proper ground; though even then there are many degrees of excellence, of response, of co-operation. And, indeed, only a third of the last division attains its full and ripe development, and gives the poor sower back, not merely thirty-fold or sixty-fold, but a hundred-fold.

So goes out the human sower. So he fares. He does not win more return than that. Yet he is not staggered. It is not unexpected. It is part and parcel of the general lot. He knows that he must risk it. He counts on much loss. There must be failure; there must be waste. Every sower is prepared for that. He would think himself a fool to complain, or to give up sowing his seed because he could not answer for the final issue. He knows that the best has been done if, at the summer harvest, he can reap, from the happy portion that fell on good soil, his thirty, his sixty, his hundred-fold.

Nor is it the sower alone. Another—a farmer—has good seed sown in his field; and lo! in the night, the enemy hath scattered tares. Now that they are there, they must be left; spoiling, misfeaturing, degrading the fair fields of corn. It is part of the evil accident,

the cruel damage, to which this life is liable. Wheat and tares, side by side! The mixed crop, the half-spoilt effort! How aggravating! how bitter! Yet the farmer is not angry, or upset. He does not rail, or rave, or despair. He quietly recognizes the fact, and how it has happened. He understands; he considers, without surprise or disturbance. "An enemy hath done this." But though it be an enemy, there is no violent protest, no hasty retaliation. He and his men must be humble and patient. They must work on with the result as it stands, accepting the misfortune, "lest while they pull up the tares, they pluck up the wheat also. Let both tares and wheat grow together until the harvest."

My brethren, you and I have to remember again and yet again, as this sad spectacle of God's kingdom comes before us, that our type of work in the city more especially unfits us to estimate some methods of God's labour. This town-work of ours calls out into energetic play just the temper which is most irritated by mixed issues; by the sight of effort spent in vain, and missed opportunities, and damaged industry, and stupid waste. We live in vehement protest against such sterile losses, against

such stupid misadventures. We cannot endure to see our labour thrown away. We are bent, as we said, on scoring results, on rapid returns, on positive reward for our outlay.

This being so, we are sure to be specially bewildered by any part of God's work which does not correspond to our practical demands. And, at such hours of irritation, our Lord bids us turn our eyes off our own sphere of industry, and meditate a little on that other vast department of human labour which occupies the fields of the earth.

"Look at the sower," He seems to say to us. "No doubt you, with your brisk and keen city ways, cannot understand what I am at. But ask the sower. He will know what I am doing. He will enter into My mind. For it is his own way, his own experience. He goes out to sow his seed, as I do ; and is quite prepared to find that some, alas ! has fallen on the stubborn pathway, and been devoured by birds ; and some on the rock, and has withered ; and some among thorns, and is choked. Ask the farmer. He has long ago learned to expect the tares among the wheat ; and still to work on, in patient endurance, content if at the end he can hope to get his residue of

wheat out separate and clean. Each makes his venture ; each submits to the loss, and the accident, and the disarray. There, in that solemn patience of the husbandman, behold the type of the mighty Father, Who sends His rain and His sun alike on good and evil, on just and unjust. And though He knows that His boons will often be thrown away and wasted, yet still He perseveres, and still begins all over again, and still goes forth as a sower to sow His seed ; and still hopes for the best ; and still gathers in what He may—what you do not spoil.”

Such is the parallel. Of course, it does not answer all our perplexities. It does not tell us why God should be reduced to such straitened working ; or why there is a hard highway, or a rocky ground, or a crop of thorns. This is not its intended office. It is but a parable, an analogy ; and, as such, it gives us help in three special ways.

(1) It declares that this unhappy aspect of the kingdom, which has puzzled and upset us, is not unprecedented, is not isolated, is not so startling or so unique. Nay ! it is matched elsewhere in God's universe. It is in harmony with what is already common. It

stands and falls, with much else. It is in line with daily experience. It falls in with what we already know, and accept by its very familiarity.

(2) And, again, the particular department of earth's surface to which it is peculiarly allied, is no remote, or foreign, or unintelligible region. For it is our own department of human labour. So near to us as that; so intelligible as that! Our own country-side labour—the old, constant, familiar work in which man has been engaged from the first: the labour of the field—ploughing, sowing, reaping. There is the analogy we seek. There is the world which falls into line with the kingdom of God. There we shall find the parallel mishaps, the parallel disappointments. Yet, there, we accept them. We endure; we plod on; we allow for waste; for long, slow, mixed processes; for uncontrollable accidents. We may not be able to explain the origin of the disasters in either department. But, at least, it need not stagger us to find that the kingdom of heaven, in entering upon earth's conditions, accepts the form and fashion which are habitual to the kingdom of earthly labour.

(3) And, thirdly, the analogy helps by assuring

us that the Lord felt and foresaw our difficulty. He, too, when He spoke to those gathered multitudes in parables, recognized how much good seed would be thrown away in waste—how unfit the soil was to receive it. There He was, with His Revelation, with His Word of Life. He had come forth to utter it to all and everywhere. Yet His blessed utterance, as He distinctly sees, would only be misinterpreted, be misused, be rejected and despised. How bitter! how baffling! His living words would have to lie on the repellent heart that had been beaten hard by the feet of the world; lie there, useless, unaccepted, until the devil snatched them away. And they would fall on souls shallow and silly that would profess much, yet would never break up the rocky core of an uncommitted will; and the heat of a fierce temptation would wither them all away. They would fall into the midst of hearts alive still with other, worldly seeds, that would quicken fast their horrid growth, and stifle and choke His own.

Was not this a sad experience for Him, as it beat in upon Him through actual contact with those crowds who seemed so eager to

listen? And He knew that what He was experiencing then with them, He would experience for ever down the long centuries; yea, would experience with us to-day, crowding round Him in this church, to hear His Voice! Ah! to-day, too, He would scatter His seed as of old, and some will be lost in this way, and some in that. Some on the highway, some on the stones, and some among thorns. Only a little will be taken deep down into the good soil, and will spring forth and bear fruit, some thirty, some sixty, and some a hundred-fold.

Bitter and sad the sight He foresaw. Yet He does not repine; yet He does not protest. For, lo! the parable speaks to Him as to us. Why should He refuse the thankless task which the very men whom He had made, meekly bore? Look at the sower. He goes forth uncomplainingly. He works through with it. He takes his losses as they come—melancholy, but enduring. Christ will place Himself by that sower's side. As he has done, so Christ will do. Bravely, perseveringly, faithfully, He will pace His appointed furrows; He will scatter wide His seed,—content with the meagre gains; caring only for one thing—that on no one

spot of the earth's field shall the seed fail to fall—shall the soul miss its chance.

Let that be our lesson to-day. Christ felt, Christ foresaw, the mixed success of His work on earth. Half, and more than half, the burden of our difficulty is lifted by that thought. He anticipated what so startles and staggers us, and yet saw good reason to go on doing what He did.

Can we not leave it all to His judgment, when once we are sure that no unexpected obstacle, no unforeseen distress, has intervened?

And, beloved, if we are bewildered that God's seed should go to waste by falling on unresponsive ground, we can, each one of us, relieve that bewilderment at one point at least. We can cease to add our own individual souls to the sum of those who turn God's gifts to nought.

Is it so, that we cannot tolerate that God's success should be so chequered by mishap? Well, then, see to it that our own heart is not the hard, bare, worldly spot, on the surface of which the golden seed lies naked and exposed to every bird that flies. Let it not be there that God's Word fails to get its way. At least there, where we can manage it, let us

justify God in His venturesome experience, in His daring risk. Surely our own heart need not be that thin, poor, stony ground, where the Word has no chance of striking a root downward, no chance of surviving the first pressure of heat and storm. Our heart need not be the rank and weedy soil, where all evil growths find a congenial home, and spring up, thick and lush and strong—bad thorns and briars, wicked roots, obstinate and ugly, which clutch at the favourable spots, and choke off the good seed.

To-day the seed has been flung. The Word of God has gone out, flung over you in Psalm and Lesson. It is lodged in the soil of every soul that has heard it. Ask yourselves, how is it faring? God has done His part—He, the patient, trusting, enduring Sower. It lies with us, with you and me, whether His labour shall have been in vain; whether His Word shall be left cold, solitary, unassimilated, exposed and idle, on the highway. It lies with us; for we can, if we will, break up the hard track which the world's feet have trodden down, and let the seed sink in; we can soften the tough rock of an obstinate selfishness, which forbids it to take root; we can dislodge the

wicked germs of worldly and sterile desires, which will spring up to choke it.

Oh! rescue God's honour—the honour of the great Husbandman—from at least one reproach; spare Him the bitterness of one more disgrace, of one more fruitless effort! Whatever happens elsewhere—whatever waste, whatever disappointment—here, in each separate soul, while it is in your power, grant Him this boon—that He may win His proper harvest; that He Who went forth weeping to sow His good seed, may come again with joy, bringing His sheaves with Him; that He may see of the travail of His soul, and be joyful.

II.

THE LEAVEN.

“The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven, which a woman took, and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened.”—ST. MATT. xiii. 33.

UP and down the surface of the earth our Lord looked for the forms and types through which He might rouse the imagination of men to the arrival and the work of this kingdom of heaven. And His eyes fell, as we have seen, on everything that was most simple, most obvious, most natural, in the daily life of human labour. And by doing so He wins our good will. For as He speaks of sowing and reaping and gathering into barns, or of garden-seeds, or of nets by the sea, or of vineyards, or merchants, or marriage feasts, we feel a sort of healthy reassurance about this mysterious kingdom. If it mingles itself in amid all that is most straightforward and familiar and clear in our habitual surroundings; if it conforms to the plainest movements

and growth of natural things ; if it harmonizes with the broad instinctive acts of man's earthly existence ; then it has so far justified itself to our acceptance. It has disarmed our prejudices against it. We cannot repudiate anything that slides in with such kindly conformity to all that we are accustomed to regard as normal and sane. As it claims to belong to our favourite horizons, as it lies under the cover of the same sky and sun, we are made to feel at home with it. So far, then, these parables from nature have carried us.

But, as our Lord's eyes travelled over the field of common life, they rested on one phenomenon, which, habitual and ordinary as it was, nevertheless had a look in it of something abnormal and sinister.

The working of leaven—this did not seem, at first sight, to belong to the more regular processes of nature. Man's imagination had been struck here by the likeness to something dark, ominous, evil. This strange disturbance, into which the natural substances were thrown by the arrival of this alien matter, what did it portend ? This secret insertion of so little within so much, by which there was set moving an inner ferment, a yeasty working, a spreading

excitement—what was it? What did it express? Was it healthy? Was it not typical, rather, of disease, corruption? It looked so uncanny, so uncomfortable. How insidiously it crept! How unaccountably it penetrated! It seemed to eat its way along; it insinuated its hidden force within the mass; until what was before quiet and at peace, began to stir with unaccountable agitation, began to shake and heave and swell. And what a portentous inflation! What a mysterious tumult! Surely, here (men said) is the very picture of what we know of the nature of sin! This is the very way of its attack! A seed, a germ, hardly suspected for its smallness, plants itself deep down within some secret recess of the soul, and from that moment the old peace has begun to break up. At first, it is a mere spot of uncomfortable disturbance; but it is ever moving forward; the stir spreads wider; there is gradual agitation; there is growing upheaval. We never quite know how or when, but somehow, point by point, our steadiness dissolves; our orderly restraint weakens; always the ferment is touching a fresh layer; always the festering eruption breaks out in a new place. And, wherever it goes, there is this same

effervescence, this inflation, this overstepping of old bounds, this swelling exuberance, this irresistible turmoil. Stronger and more violent grows the heat of the motion; it rushes forward over the whole material; nothing can, at last, hold out against its devouring extravagance. It eats into the whole body as doth a canker. Like a poison in the blood, it permeates every nook and corner. And all from so tiny a beginning! Yes; like a little leaven, "it leaveneth the whole lump."

So men thought of leaven. They might use it, indeed, for the homeliest affairs; but still it became for them a type of the movement of evil. Its working seemed to embody the dreadful character of the mystery of iniquity. It had, therefore, proverbially, a sinister significance.

And in the Bible itself it is generally used, as a symbol, under this comparison. "Know ye not," says St. Paul, "that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump?" So he spoke, as he detected in his Corinthian Church the germ of a hateful, poisonous growth. This tolerated sin, in which they had so lightly acquiesced, would be in their midst as a focus of fermentation, as a spot of disease, corrupting,

corroding, festering. It could not be there and not attack the whole body ; its restless irritation, its feverish energy, would be felt everywhere. Do they not know well how a little leaven gets at the whole lump ?

Or, again, "Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees !" So our Lord Himself uses the symbol. Leaven would obviously image that working of the spirit of Pharisaism, which so insidiously crept in unseen, within the very heart of goodness, within the very core of the moral will. There it seated itself ; there it set its vicious animation astir ; noxious, turbid, frothy, inflated, like an evil possession, it permeated the entire man with its sourness, its touchy pride, its heated extravagance. "Beware of this bad leaven."

And then how deeply was this impression intensified by the sacred memory of the Jew's great feast of deliverance—the Passover ! There, at that hour of high thanksgiving, in grateful remembrance of the redemption that, once for all, brought him up out of the gross darkness of Egypt, he was summoned, year after year, to cast out of his house every fragment of the evil leaven that recalled the black days of sin and servitude. On the day before the Feast

of Unleavened Bread, when all leavened bread had been removed, it became a custom to leave one fragment of leaven half concealed in some room upstairs; and then the whole household in a body set themselves to search the house through, to see if any remained; and the prepared morsel was solemnly discovered, and carried away by the assembled family, and cast out-of-doors. So, in a domestic rite, they symbolized the rigorous devotion which they owed to that historic evening, the last in Egypt, when their forefathers eat the Passover in haste, with their shoes on their feet, with their loins girt, and with leavened bread; prepared to cast behind them every scrap of that old bad life amid the flesh-pots of Egypt; prepared to surrender themselves wholly to that long pilgrimage by which they would pass through the waters of the Red Sea, to the promised land, and the hill of Zion.

Such was the Jew's natural memory of leaven; and we can well understand with what force it would support St. Paul's appeal to this ancient feeling, as he bade the Corinthians purge out that old leaven of theirs, "that ye may be a new lump, even as ye are unleavened. For Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us:

therefore let us keep the feast, not with the old leaven of malice and wickedness ; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth."

Leaven, then, was popularly, was instinctively, a metaphor that suggested the mystery of iniquity—the working of evil. But our Lord, as His eyes rested on it in its familiar uses, as He caught sight of this or that woman inserting the little piece of sour dough into two or three large measures of meal, saw the symbol of a device which He might use for the profit of His own kingdom. This is the well-known way in which evil corrupts—is it? Well, it is strangely effectual, it is typically complete. Why not adopt it as a method, and turn it to good use? Here, in this fashion, no doubt, sin germinated within the fair body of the earth as God made it. It insinuated itself deep down in a tiny particle, and from thence, from within, it spread like a vicious influence, like an irresistible agitation, until the whole fabric was possessed with the feverish stir. Here, then, in this same fashion, shall God's name re-enter this world that He once made so good. Evil shall be met by its own weapons. It shall be outdone in its own field. Even as the best efforts of the merchants

who seek goodly pearls are surpassed and overtopped by God's effort to bring in His kingdom,—so, too, the direst and most secret power of sin shall be met and overmatched by the profounder and subtler influence of God. Right in the heart of all this lump of evil, which has now become so set in its own low ways, so sodden, so sluggish, so torpid, so inert, shall a tiny germ of good be deposited, and out from it the recovery shall begin to work. It shall work just as a disease works, just as leaven works. It shall be a spot of stirring energy, out from which shall issue a heat, an agitation, an effervescence, which shall creep from point to point, penetrative, subtle, pervading. It shall spread its turmoil, it shall enlarge its area of disturbance. It shall undermine the ancient tyrannies of wrong. It shall rouse out of slumber the sodden weight of hopelessness. Irresistibly it shall move forward; and wherever it comes, there will be a shaking, a tossing, an inner upheaving, a mysterious ferment, an irrepressible growth, an enlargement, an expansion, a fulness of uplifting forces, which will not stop or stay until it has touched and covered and transfigured the entire mass. Such shall be the method

of the kingdom. As the fall, so shall be the recovery. Just as our Lord, in the parables of the Unjust Judge and of the Unjust Steward, laid hold of the principles by which evil won its way, and showed how victoriously they illustrated the very methods by which He desired His own servants to press forward the fortunes of the kingdom; so here He tells them how His own goodness, in its zeal for redemption, shall not be ashamed to condescend to the same obscure inner secrecy by which sin achieved its triumphs. He would outmaster, outflank, the mystery of iniquity by the mystery of godliness. This shall be His means of redemption, His law of grace. A little leaven shall leaven the whole lump.

My brethren, I know no symbol to which I turn more often for comfort and relief in days like our own, than this of the leaven. For the kingdom of heaven adapts its advances to the changes of the periods; and surely, in a period of confused transformation such as that through which it is our lot to pass, we may well expect that Christ would make use of a method so peculiarly appropriate to the circumstances with which He has to deal. "As leaven hidden in three measures of meal!" The picture

flashes in upon our mental eye with such reassuring emphasis, as we stagger at the strange formlessness of this kingdom of Christ on earth. A kingdom—so it was to be called and known. A kingdom; and that suggests, as we said, firm and clear outlines—steady as an army with banners. And then we look out over civilized Europe, and see the Name of Christ struggling, as it were, to hold its place under the resistant pressure of unchristian forces that encompass it about. Politics, society, trade,—these appear to overlay it; to encumber; almost to suffocate it. It disappears beneath the weight of all this unspiritual matter, which abides there untouched and unaffected, sodden, sluggish, and gross. The main mass of motives with which men barter and treat and exchange, or with which they regulate their social behaviour, or with which they direct the national and international life of the people, presents a surface to the eye throughout which Christ makes no apparent sign, over which His authority hardly can be said to appear, even if it is not directly contradicted. What is to be done with all this? How is it tolerable? Where is the promise of Christ's coming? Has He failed?

Or, if not, why is His work delaying? Why is His judgment withheld? Thus every one must have asked himself, in anxiety, in anguish, again and again; so undisturbed is this dominion of the world, so silent and secret the working of Christ.

And then it is that we recall, to our relief, how it was said that the kingdom should come hidden deep in three measures of meal. A "kingdom" it is, still. A kingdom!—something that is bent on becoming organic, complete, visible, supreme; something that makes for clear frontiers and for shapely rules, such as none can mistake, such as all can see. Yes! but, in the mean time, it will work its way towards this complete and orderly condition by creeping behind the immense masses of unredeemed stuff. Right deep down within them it will crouch and hide and crawl. Inside it will lie, hidden from all eyes. Round and about it will be the heavy and formless meal. It will be buried there out of sight. But it holds in it the full potency of final victory; it has in it the energy to transform the whole lump. And, in the security of this ultimate triumph, it will be content to be but a spot of stirring motion, a focus of heat, a germ

deposited, secreted, from out of which a dim ferment will issue, an upheaval, an agitation.

And how vague and indistinct will such an agitation be! It will be felt here, and there, and everywhere. No one will be able quite to say how far its influence reaches. No one will be able to draw a line exactly where the leavening stops, and where the lump is wholly untouched. The dividing line will be ever vanishing. Ever the movement will retreat, advance, disappear, reappear again. At the centre, it is all warm, and pushing, and pricking, and effectual. At the surface, all is yet dull, and cold, and ponderous, and sodden. Not a signal there to bless us, and announce that God is there. And between the centre and the surface an undetermined lump of meal, as it were; some becoming alive with hope, some just touched by a shimmering movement, some coldly resistant of what is even now pressing its attack.

(1) Is not that a perfect picture of Western civilization as it stands? Is not that the process by which the Name of Christ is even now making good its hold? Like that it would be; so said our Lord.

Like leaven hidden. We know how a fatal

disease creeps over a fair body ; how all looks well without—the colour of health, the bloom of hope ; and within, the dark cancerous secret. Well, it shall be the same reversed. Outwardly, there shall be the white, wasted look of sickness, the hopelessness of apparent decay ; no flush on the cheek, no light in the eye. But within, the blessed secret is at work ; the stir of recovery has begun ; the force of health has been inserted. It will creep and creep from the innermost recesses where it is securely planted, and at last, it will make good its hold on face and eyes and limbs.

Hold on, then, in strong confidence ! Christ is here, in the very midst of our bewildered civilization, when all looks worst. He has fastened Himself into the very flesh of men ; He has knit Himself into the very texture of our bodily fabric. He cannot be displaced. And, being there, He is at work ; He is astir. His Divine activity cannot but prick, and heave, and heat. Let us be content, then ! Not be petulant, or doubtful, or alarmed. His kingdom was to arrive in this fashion. It was to be like leaven, which a woman should take and hide in three measures of meal.

(2) And not only is this true of Christianity amid the weight of an unredeemed civilization, but also of the Church itself. If we turn our eyes on to what definitely claims to embody and represent this kingdom of heaven, we need again and again to recur to this parable. For here, too, there is such a huge mass of matter involved that has suffered no change to pass over it—that lies there within the Church, heavy and earthly and sluggish. How little the surface of the Church speaks to us of any spiritual thrill alive within it! How much is blindly unconscious of the secrets which it enshrines—of the Catholic life transmitted to it, of the sacramental energy of the Incarnation at work in its hidden places! On it all goes in its own humdrum drowsiness, and never seems to dream for a moment of a sacred mystery that it holds in charge.

Yes, indeed, this dulness of apprehension would startle us if we had not the word of the Master, saying ever in our ears, "Remember; I have told you before; that when it is come to pass, ye may believe! Remember; I told you it would be so. The Divine kingdom itself would often be driven underground. It would lurk behind blind stuff. It would lie

buried in three measures of meal. But yet, there it would be!"

The woman who hides her leaven in the meal is not put out or perplexed. She bides her time. She is confident that if the leaven is there, at last the ferment will triumph, at last the whole will be leavened. Yes, the whole three measures.

Be patient, then, as she is. Be secure. So long as the holy leaven is in the Church, God's footing is assured, the victory is pledged. The dead lumps of worldly matter will stir at last. Wait, and believe, and pray!

(3) Beloved, how often in ourselves we are in despair at the slow and secret work of the kingdom of heaven! "Is anything happening at all?" we ask. "Am I ever going to be conscious of the warmth, of the uplifting, of the kindling vitalities? Ah, how flat and stale the whole self lies! How dormant, how oppressed, how miserably weighted! Can I in any sense claim to be, indeed, a member of Christ, a child of God, an inheritor of the kingdom of heaven? Is it not absurd to talk such high language of a life lived on so poor a level—unthrilled, unvisited, uninspired?" Well it is bad enough, God knows! But there is

one thing that is sure—that if the living Christ be but in us, then God the Father sees us as possessed of Him. He foresees all that may yet issue from Him to penetrate and pervade us. Yea! all that *must*, if we do not resolutely check it. He can be patient, as the woman who watched her three measures of meal. A little leaven will at last, if you give it time, leaven the whole lump.

Christ is our Leaven. That is our sole security. And that security is absolute. We are so dull, so sodden, so base; yet within us He abides and lives and works—the vital pledge of our fulfilment, of our consecration.

Christ is our Leaven! Therefore, in that sole confidence, let us not be afraid, still as ever, to keep the feast; to claim the privilege; to rank ourselves on God's side; to lay hold of the altar.

Christ is our Leaven! We cannot create in ourselves the motions, the aspirations, the spiritual desires, that we long for. Nay, they are not of our human manufacture. He alone can; we must leave it to Him!

But yet, as He is within us Who is as leaven, be sure that He is stirring; that He is at work. It cannot be that He is idle or in-

effectual. What, then, is He doing? Where do we recognize His upward push? Surely it is to be felt somewhere. Is there not some sign of His underground Presence; some lift; some thrust; some pricking of the spirit; some upheaval; some disturbance; some shaking; some rising demand; some increasing fear; some growing anxiety; some quickened scruple? Is it not happening? Well, that is the working of the leaven in the meal; that is what it is our part to attend to. We must let it go forward, give it free way. Oh, let us beware if in any way we press it back, we choke it, we neglect or deny it! For our final judgment turns just on this—whether we will suffer this leaven of Christ to do its work within us or not.

Our judgment! That day of which St. Michael is so shortly to remind us;¹ that day when all this mixed, confused, intangible process of leavening will close, and all that is hidden will be revealed! Then, on that day of the flaming sword and the mounting hosts—on that day, when the kingdom of heaven will no longer be as leaven in the meal, but as the outbreak of a winnowing wind, which shall divide asunder the wheat and the chaff,—then

¹ Preached on the last Sunday in September.

it will be known how we have behaved, in the old silent days on earth, towards the secret appeal of the living Christ. Those old silent days; the days that now are ours. Ah! remember; it will be seen then how we are standing towards His inner appeal hidden in our hearts to-day!

Therefore be loyal now. Take heed of the hidden leaven; surrender to its pressure, to its warmth. For that kingdom of heaven, which St. Michael will bring to light, is even now within us.

III.

THE TREASURE IN THE FIELD.

"The kingdom of heaven is like unto a treasure hid in a field."—ST. MATT. xiii. 44.

THE purpose of a parable is at once to attract and to provoke. It has to entice by its easy charm, by its frank simplicity, by the breadth and humanity of its appeal. But always it has to sustain an inner note of warning, that shall be heard sounding on throughout the surface-story, and crying, "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear!" "He that hath ears!" There is something more than appears at first hearing. There is something that needs attention to perceive it; something of special and unparaded interest. Therefore be not idle; give your mind to it. Listen with alertness. Keep your wits on the stretch. For you must have ears, if you would hear it.

Just take one instance of the way in which these parables of the kingdom of heaven fulfil

this intention. At first hearing they are so direct, so easy. Could any one fail to understand imagery so plain, so universal, so sympathetic? The use of the commonest matters of daily labour and life seems to discard the possibility of mystery or of difficulty. It must be a simple and common truth, surely, that is conveyed in such common and simple analogies.

So we lightly fancy ; and, so fancying, we go on listening.

But, then, as we listen on, does it not strike us that the very multiplicity of the images used to portray this kingdom of heaven is itself a source of perplexity? The images are simple enough, but they are so unlike each other! How can they all apply to the same thing? What a strange, what an incomprehensible affair this kingdom of heaven must be, which is at once like a sower sowing, and like a mustard-seed growing, and like leaven working in a lump of meal, and like a net cast into the sea, and like a treasure hid in a field, and like a rare and beautiful pearl ; or, again, is like a marriage feast which a king made for his son ; or like a man travelling into a far country and committing his money to his servants, or farming out his vineyard to labourers ; or like

ten virgins with their lamps, waiting for a lingering bridegroom!

How is all this to be put together? How is it all to be brought to a single distinct and significant impression? How, at the close of each tale, are we to recognize the same anti-type? Yet to our Lord, evidently, the meaning that He would convey by all this variety of symbol is quite precise, regular, clear. It is a "kingdom" that He is picturing. A kingdom! Not a vague, formless idea, floating about life, entering into ever new combinations, transforming itself into ever new forms and fashions. No! not an idea, but a real and positive condition of existence; something uniform, organic, regulated, intelligible. Something that has consistency, government, continuity, solidity, coherence. Something that works on fixed principles, and hangs together, and testifies to an undivided administration and to a consecutive story. A kingdom! That is what ever stands before the eye of the Lord, as He speaks to us in parables; a kingdom, with steady outlines, with firm frontiers, with ordered territories, coming down from heaven, and entering in upon the earth, and taking its place amid the substantial solidities of human

circumstance. This it is. It is to be seen as "a city set on a hill." It has all the administrative machinery of a great household, of a royal domain.

But if so, how then can it be lissom and elastic and mobile as a dream? It is only the shifting and vaporous clouds, without substance, without identity, that can change with every changing breath of air, and are never the same, and can look at one moment like a whale, and at another like a camel. How can a kingdom, which is the very type of settled consistency, of unvarying permanence, shift and change so that the mental eye cannot fix its ever-vanishing shape, as now it appears like a net, and now like a feast, and now like a seed, and now like a vineyard?

There, in that question lies the secret provocation of the parables. This is one way, at least, in which they force those who are in earnest with what they hear, to go behind, to look deeper, to demand interpretation.

And, my brethren, to those who so press in, there can be but one solution of this particular difficulty. It lies in the Personality of Jesus Christ. He it is Who is Himself the Spring and Source of all that constitutes that kingdom.

And the kingdom that He has come to found and to fashion is a kingdom of living personalities, knit up into His own living Person, knit together as a living organic body into the one Head. Only so, as a kingdom of which both the source as well as the material are all personal throughout, can it be at once so pliable and yet so self-identical, so mobile and yet so positive. For a personality displays and retains its consistent identity through all the variety of its actions. That is exactly what we mean by it—this retention of identity through difference. And so the Personality of Jesus gathers up into its own persistent identity all the varied and manifold and scattered actions by which it is manifested. However diverse they be, however unexpected, through them all there issues a single Will, a single Character—Jesus Christ, the one Lord. And thus in Him they are built together into a single and coherent whole. They form a “kingdom,”—“the kingdom of heaven.”

The kingdom of heaven, then, in all its plastic freedom, in all its infinite variety, is always one thing—the manifestation of the Person of Jesus Christ on earth.

And now, remembering that we are dealing

with just one aspect of this ever-changing kingdom, let us turn to the particular symbol selected for my text, "The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in a field."

Here is one way in which the manifestation of Jesus Christ will offer itself to men.

It will not always, so we learn, force itself upon their notice. It will not always be writ large in front of them. It will not come with a shout, placarded abroad. It will not present itself as the steady goal of all effort, as a glorious prize for which to strain and strive. That is what we might well expect it to be. That, indeed, it often will be. But not always. No; quite the contrary. It will lie back, unobserved and unsuspected, as "a treasure hid in a field!" "In a field;" in some common everyday place; a place which suggests no wonderful find, which excites no curiosity, which prompts no effort. "A field!" An ordinary field. Across it men come and go; and cattle graze there; and birds alight and fly off again; and bees go buzzing past it; and grass grows silently there; and flowers spring and bud and fade. And the rains fall thereon, and the dew; and the snow spreads itself there in soft slumber; and the sun passes slowly across its

homely surface; and the moon looks down; and seedtime and harvest follow from year to year. It is nothing but a field, a field like any other field. It calls out no peculiar interest. No one, as he passes, stays and wonders what it is that the field conceals, or has an instinctive thrill that bids him look again. No one sets to work to dig there in search of a secret. No sign is given; no voice arrests, or warns, or guides. A mere field, it sleeps there in silence—unheeded, unremarked, unsuspected.

Until one day, just by chance, by accident, without meaning it, without foreseeing it, some man, in the midst of his labour in the fields, stumbles upon a treasure hid there; a treasure that neither he nor any one else had ever heard of. It was the last place in the world in which to look for it. If he covered it up and went away to buy the field, not a soul would dream of what he was after. Yet it was the treasure of treasures—the treasure worth all else that the man had ever possessed; a treasure worth his winning at any price. He went away, and for the joy thereof sold all that he had, and bought that field.

That, my brethren, is the way in which, as our Lord tells us, it will often happen that

His kingdom will be found by us. It may sound, when we first hear it, so unlikely for a revelation from God to proceed in that fashion. Yet how well we know it, how perfectly it describes our most frequent experience!

This human life of ours, as we survey its surface with ordinary unilluminated eyes, makes no suggestion of the deep secrets that it holds in reserve. How little it looks as if it held within it a manifestation of Jesus; a kingdom of heaven! A common field we should pronounce it; that, and nothing more.

(1) Take the earth itself, with its woods and fields. We glance over it, and it seems so solid and complete. It accounts for itself so completely. It has its habitual ways, laws, habits. These have always continued as they are. We can make our accustomed calculation about them; we can count on their steadfastness. And that is all that is needed. There those hills will stand; there those rivers will run; we can be sure of it. We cannot know how or why, of course; but that does not the least interfere with our practical experience of earth's sameness, of earth's intelligible commonplace. Wonder—our early child-wonder—very soon drops away, and we get to take all the sum

of daily things as they come, as they are. Just now, for instance, we are all discussing the harvest and its prospects.¹ We read the careful analysis of the results by the correspondent in the *Times*. All is duly tabulated, noted, explained—the disturbing rainfall, the lingering and chilly spring, the delayed rescue of the heat. These account for all that has happened. The barometrical record is analyzed, classified, and interpreted. Everything is plain, fixed, usual. We talk it over; we compare notes with our friends; we sum it up. So much for 1891, and in 1892 we shall repeat the process. It is all such plain sailing, all matter-of-fact. All of it falls well within the ordinary horizons of sensible business men.

And this is quite possible. For the earth lies quiet under our handling. She submits to our inspection, to our criticism, to our analysis; she conforms to our interpretation. She spreads herself out there, dumb and unprotesting, while we pass our hands over her, and feel her, and examine her, and pass judgment upon her, and distribute her resources. How little does she hint of the secret that lies concealed within her! How little does she insist that she holds

¹ Preached in September.

in her a treasure hidden ! A mere field—a field for human labour—we might say ; that is all ; a field on the face of which the generations of men work out their little lives, and perish, and are buried.

And yet there, within it all, right in the very heart of it, is God. There is Christ, the living Person, Who is the Word and the Will of God ; in Whom the whole world was made ; by Whom it holds together at this and every hour ; without Whose secret vitality all this huge fabric would dissolve, melt, and resolve itself into a dew. There He lives, works, moves, unsuspected, unregarded, as a treasure buried in a field.

(2) Or, again, the world of men and women, as we watch on at them, how little do they suggest of the secret mystery within them ! These hurrying crowds, as they pass us in the streets, or in the shops at their work, what a commonplace business do they seem to represent ! We can guess at all the motives, interests, aims, which they embody. We know them all ; they are thoroughly on our own level—habitual, intelligible, ordinary. Their faces tell the tale plainly enough. They reveal the sort of affairs with which they are

concerned—the hopes, fears, joys, passions, anxieties, amusements, which sway them. There is nothing mysterious here. If we stopped one of them as he passed along, and he was a friend, and we began to talk, we know exactly the topics which would be uppermost. We should ask after his health, and after those at his home, what sort of holiday he had had, how he was doing now in business, perhaps of something in the papers, of the theatres, of the splendid weather; and we should shake hands and say good-bye. Not a word would pass on any deeper matter; not a hint would be given of anything within. No reference would be dropped at all outside the conventional and familiar limits of this everyday world. So it would be; and I am not saying that there is anything wrong in this. We cannot force spiritual interests into every casual conversation. Only, how hard, how terribly hard it becomes, amid the multiplicity of such encounters, to sustain one's faith against the pressure of the commonplace! How hard to recall one's self, and say, "Every one of this swarming multitude has a living soul. They are all baptized Christians, and within each

soul dwells the Spirit of the living Jesus. In Him, the Christ, they live and move and have their being. He is the sacred, the unalterable Treasure, Who lurks buried within this common, this well-worn field."

(3) Or, again, there is another field, which is only too apt to conceal the treasure, to which it is peculiarly dedicated. The Church within which the living Lord abides; the Church which is His Body, His Spouse;—this Church often wears an outward air and garb which is the very last that would imply that where treasure is there her heart is also. What a commonplace, worldly concern she too looks! How obvious, how usual, how comprehensible, how human, the motives and interests that are concerned with her work! How little in her there seems of the virgin trimming her lamp through the night, listening for the voice of the Bridegroom Who delays so long! Nothing about her catches our eye that is luminous, suggestive, prophetic. All is dull and drab and dusty. She has imbedded herself within so much that smacks of the earth. Even those of us who are deeply interested in her welfare, find ourselves discussing her fortunes, finances, interests, influence, in much the same tone

and language as we should use about any other institution. Her clergy have most obviously the failings, the weaknesses, the faults, of other men. If we talk over their ways, their successes, their chances of promotion, how poor, how base, the level to which we drop! Who would imagine that we were speaking of the work of the Holy Ghost Who administers and distributes the gifts and capacities within the Body of Jesus Christ? Alas! I do not mean that this is all right. It is not able to be condoned. The hideous worldliness of the Church is not to be justified by this parable. But not all of this earthly appearance of the Church is wrong, because some sin of ours has intermingled with it; for it was intended, even without any sin of worldliness, but just because this Body of Christ was made out of the dust of the earth, just because it was the Body of Him Whom men esteemed not, Who was Himself without form or comeliness that we should desire Him,—it was intended that it should be possible for the Church of the living God to appear to the outward, unillumined eyes as a mere ordinary field, like any other field. It would be possible, so He forewarned us,

for those outside not to dream of the treasure buried within. It would be possible for men to pass it by; to cross over it a thousand times, in heedless indifference, without an inkling of what they would find if they dug. Yes; this much would be true—and rightly true—that the kingdom of heaven, the Church itself, might appear as a blind field, in which a treasure lay hidden and unannounced.

“A treasure hid in a field!” Yes, but a treasure “which a man finds.” One day it happens—happens so strangely, so suddenly, by the oddest of accidents. Right in the middle of our common work, without our forethought, without our prayers, perhaps, we stumble upon the truth; we find the treasure. Lo! there it lies in the field that showed no sign. There it had lain all this time!

“(1) The field of nature—of earth! One day, at some solemn sunset, at some hour of kindled emotion, or perhaps under the excitement of some violent accident or providential escape, it all flashes in upon us. The earth, even the hard shell of the physical earth, seems to become alive. It breathes like a living thing. There are pulsations that pass and shake us. There is an Eye that seems to look through

and hold us. There is a Voice that is heard, without language, without sound. We catch for the moment the powers at play ; the powers that are ever labouring within this material screen ; the powers that weave the web of the garment of God. Suddenly we know it. We are in the presence of a living Will. There is a Person Who moves within the whirlwind, and directs the storm ; Who makes the winds His angels, and the flames of fire His ministers. He is here ; we are before Him. "How dreadful is this place !" This poor, bare, naked field, of which we thought so little as we used it for our bed,—“this is none other than the house of God ; this is the gate of heaven !” So, sometimes, we find it.

(2) Or the field of human nature,—do we not suddenly find ourselves in this field, too, brought up short by an unlooked-for discovery ? Under the strain of some sudden blow, some terrible temptation, some heart-breaking loss, the veil that hangs over a man's heart is abruptly torn aside. We are admitted within the shrine of his soul ; and lo ! within this man or woman, whom we thought so commonplace, so like other people, so superficial, so much in the world, so amusing, with such high spirits, we

see what startles us. A spiritual tragedy has been going on, some heroic struggle, some passionate hope, in the secret recesses of his soul. It has been going on, and now we suddenly recognize it. All the deepest forces of the personal life suddenly come to the surface and declare themselves. We learn what a vital reality religion had been to this man who hid it so deep from us. We learn how he has striven against some sin, what a sacrifice he has made in the cause of love or duty—he who looked to us so easy-going, so careless! We are ashamed to find how profoundly we had misjudged him. We begin to suspect how many and how rich are the treasures that lie close about us, hidden under the social conventions of common life.

(3) And the Church—that other field! Do we know what it is to have discovered the real powers of the Church of God? That Church, which we had for so long taken to be merely an excellent institution; a customary affair of familiar life, that seems to suit our English habits and temper; a State establishment, necessary to sustain the general credit of religion; a wholesome bulwark of social morality; a pleasant and gentlemanly method

of satisfying our spiritual conscience ;—that Church, at some moment or other, appears to open, to let us through. We pass in at some door ; we cross a line ; we look up, and a strange thing lies before us. There, in the holy places, there it is—the treasure for which our heart has hungered. We look ; we go near. We take ; we handle ; we taste. Verily it is the living Lord ! It is Jesus, that was dead, and is now alive for evermore ; Jesus, the Beginning and the End, Who holds in His Hands the keys of heaven and hell ; Jesus Christ, our Master, our Brother, our King, come down, in the might of the Father, through the ministry of the Spirit, to be the Forgiveness of our sins, the Food of our souls ; by Whose touch we are healed ; of Whose Body and Blood we may eat, and not die !

Ah, beloved ! if any such a discovery, whether in nature, or in man, or in the Church, is ever vouchsafed to us, we have but one plain duty. The man who stumbled on the treasure hid in the field made up his mind at once. Straight off he went, then and there ; “and for joy thereof he sold all that he had,” to get hold of that field with its treasure. We must act with the same ready decision.

It must be action that is taken—action of some kind that pledges us to the truth of what has been disclosed to us. For when once we have seen and known, then we may never more go back to the former level on which we once lightly lingered. We may not let Nature sink back to its old mechanical godlessness. We may not forget as readily as of old that the men and women about us have souls, and may be friends of Jesus. We may not fall back from the Apocalyptic vision of the living Christ moving amid the seven golden candlesticks; nor be ever again satisfied to regard the Church of England as an established institution, dependent for its existence on worldly resources and social influence.

No! all this is gone for us; it is become a forbidden thing. And we must take some step, practical and decisive, by which we may keep our hold on the treasure that has been uncovered. Something we must do that will bind us to go on believing in what we have seen—to go on when the light fades, and the moment passes, and all slips back again; and the earth looks drab and dull; and men seem utterly common and conventional; and the glory has vanished from the Church, and left

it to appear weak and sordid and earthy. For our treasure is in earthen vessels—it is hid in a field ; and we must be prepared, now and again, to find that the earthen vessel or the field is all that our eyes can see. Be sure of it—such times will come, over and over again, when once more we shall see nothing but a field, and shall hardly persuade ourselves that a treasure can be buried there !

Therefore be ready for these times beforehand. Act on your belief, as it is when it is strongest and most clear-sighted. Commit yourselves to what you found on the good day when you stumbled on the treasure. Your one duty now is to hold fast that faith ; to be loyal to that standard ; to remember the joy with which you found it ! Ah, that joy ! Buy that field. Fasten on that treasure ; grip it ; cling to it. Never let go what once, in some moment of vision, you have suddenly stumbled upon. For, indeed, that treasure is above rubies. “It cannot be gotten for gold, nor shall silver be paid for the price thereof.” It is the kingdom of heaven. It is Jesus Christ.

Was it not a joy beyond all joys you had ever known—the joy of realizing that every barrier had fallen away, every veil had been

withdrawn ; that heaven and earth had opened, and that you and Jesus Christ were at last face to face, with nothing between ? Believe me, that joy is so deep that, even when it is won under the shadow of some awful danger, some terrific crisis, it may yet surpass all the sorrow in and by which it has been gained, and overbalance all the pain. Such joy it is—at any cost—to know God, and Jesus Christ Whom He has sent.

Oh ! in the Name of Him, Who for the joy set before Him endured the Cross, and despised the shame, follow after the steps of Him, Who for that joy let go all that He had, that He might win the field with its treasure.

IV.

THE TARES.

“An enemy hath done this.”—ST. MATT. xiii. 28.

THERE is always a certain relief, and even some comfort, in knowing the worst of a bad business. We can feel this when some bearer of ill news has given up the hopeless task, on which he had been despatched, of breaking the news gently to us, and has surrendered all compassionate shufflings, and disguises, and compromises, and fictions, and has blurted out the bare and naked truth. The bank has broken in which our main savings were lodged. If that be what he has got to tell, then let him tell it. Let us have it all out. There is no good pretending that perhaps it will not turn out to be quite so bad as it seems, or that there may be a mistake, or that the directors still have hopes of realizing a large portion of the assets, or that the liquidation

may succeed in reducing the loss. No; the plain fact had better be faced. A few questions reveal exactly where it lies; there is a real reaction from the deadening clutch of anxiety as we arrive at the final revelation. "Is that really all?" "Yes; all." "Is there nothing more to come?" "No; nothing whatever." Ah, well, we breathe a little freer. The horrid sinking of suspense is arrested. We touch ground. There is something in that.

Such a moment appeals to our better self—to our manhood. Something in us emerges to meet it. Many a man who, under ordinary troubles, is anxious, fussy, fretful, has disclosed a strange fund of strength, has discovered in himself a spring of peace, in face of a sudden and undisguised calamity. The fiat of the doctor, breaking in upon a successful life in which no peril was suspected, announcing that the hour has struck, that the terror has come, that death is inevitable, has shattered and dispersed all the minor infirmities which hung about the temper, and has carried into it a great calm. The surface-waters which every breeze ruffled, which tossed and fumed in their ebb and flow, are withdrawn, and the quiet under-rocks of the life disclose them-

selves. The man listens to the words that had so often struck a chill into his veins in mere imagination of their possibility, and lo! he finds himself strangely controlled, strangely unalarmed, strangely steady. "Do you mean," he hears himself quietly asking, "that there is no hope of my recovering?" "No; none, I fear." "I must die of it?" "Yes, in the end you must." "There is nothing you can do to save me?" "Nothing that will be permanent." There it is, then. The fate that all have to face, is come—is here. And, as all qualifications of its rigorous reality drop off, as all delays and postponements are swept aside, the force that is in us rises to the crisis. Something firm, resolute, heroic, speaks.

"Nay! let me face the whole of it! Fare like my peers,
The heroes of old!"

The depths and the heights open upon us. We see where we stand, and what life means. Earth's shadows flee; the lights of the great dawn break. God, the soul, eternity—we have found them at last. We can touch them now. Before they seemed to us only names, only dreams; now we understand. We lean on them, and they carry us. It is like the

Patriot, in Browning's noble poem, whose cause is hopelessly lost, who is passing to the scaffold, while the rope cuts his wrists tied behind his back, and he thinks, by the feel, his forehead bleeds—

“For they fling, whoever has a mind,
Stones at me for my misdeeds ;”

yet is conscious of a deeper safety, of a surer peace, than when, in his triumph—

“It was roses, roses all the way,
And the house-roofs seemed to heave and sway,
And the church spires flared, such flags they had,
But a year ago on this very day.”

Safer now, and more at peace, because it is God, and not man, to whom he looks ; God Who fills up the whole space, left vacant of applauding crowds. “I am safer so. It's God shall repay.” Such is the strengthening relief that comes from knowing and facing the worst. And it is this which seems to speak to us out of the quiet words of the householder in our Lord's parable, “An enemy hath done this.”

There is no attempt at escaping from the conviction. There is no glozing over the disaster. There is no protest against it ; no struggle, no anger, no violence. There is no dallying with the conclusion, no fighting it off,

no belittling it, no economizing the full truth before the excited labourers. There is no pretence that it is other than a dire disaster; nor any attempt at self-justification; no claim to have foreseen it; no disguise of the fact that a march has been stolen, a blow delivered, a nasty trick successfully accomplished. There it is—a real defeat! It is done; and done not by mischance, or by some unlucky accident that no one could have anticipated, to which every one is liable. No; done out of direct spite, by a foe who thoroughly meant it—meant to hurt, meant to cruelly sting, meant deliberately to do his utmost to spoil and wreck the good householder's intentions.

And, moreover, it is done effectually, and for ever. There is no undoing it now, so far as that crop goes. There the evil thing is, and there it must stay. It has been imbedded so cleverly, so successfully, that the risk of uprooting it is greater than the risk of letting it bide. There it must be, day after day, month after month; and it must grow, and assert itself, and ever flaunt its hateful presence, like a taunt flung in one's face, reviving the bitter memory of the good hope that was spoilt, renewing the old sting of shame, stirring the old indignation.

It must bide and grow as fast as the wheat ; level with it ; witnessing, in ever more vivid publicity, to the victorious villainy that had besmirched the fair field. No hasty separation can get rid of it ; no eager vehemence can put things straight. The old happy condition is vanished beyond recall. On and on to the end the scoffing foe must enjoy his triumph. He will watch on with glee at the ineradicable wrong. All this must be endured, must be accepted. There is nothing more to be said. It is done ; and an enemy hath done it.

“An enemy hath done this.” Deep and far back the words carry us. They seem to issue, in their patient calm, out of that first hour when God the Father, moving in the evening amid the trees of the garden, called to the man that He had made, to come out of his miserable hiding-place. There he stood, crouching, afraid, disgraced, fallen—he who had been made so good ! It was all gone now—the blessed moment of innocence ; the hope of happy days, of sinless growth. Gone, the sweet companionship that might have sprung up out of that early instinctive sense of God’s Presence. Gone, the tender grace of the first dawn. The stain was on it now. The flaw

had started. The thing was done. Sin was there. Sin had crept in ; the twist had been given ; the germ was lodged ; the taint had taken hold. And now that it was done, there was no annulling it. It was to be accepted and faced. The effect must last, and last to the very close. To undo it was worse than to let it continue.

“Better now that they should grow together,” Ah! what a story lies ahead, weary, woeful, desolate—the ever-growing sin spreading as the good spreads, rooting itself where the good is rooted. Sin will be always there, at the side of the good ; never any good wheat without its companion tare. Sin dogging the good—its mate, its bedfellow, its evil shadow, its haunting ghost ! It will follow so close. It will persist everywhere and in everything. It will not be shaken off. It will have to be allowed for, counted upon. It will flaunt its horrid necessity. It will cling like a corpse to the living. It will eat its way like a cancer into the body of humanity. Ever the man will carry within him this sentence of death. And everything he does will be touched by some perversion, thwarted by some ugly misfeature, tainted by some foulness. Even his approach to God will

be damaged and soiled by this ingrown wrong. His religion will itself be hurt, be spoilt. It will be stained with lust and blood. There will be no good without its neighbour evil from now to the end of the world. It must be left so until then—until the harvest; that far, far harvest, dimly discerned beyond the furthest horizon of the dismal history. All is inevitable now.

And with it, with this inevitable sin, God foresees, too, the terror of the remedy. The Son of His love, sent to be despised, rejected, wounded in the house of His friends; sold as a slave, hung on a gallows; the bloody sweat, the bitter Passion—all are there; all are included in that poor, shamefaced, most miserable man, who now creeps out of his hiding, before his God. It is the very worst that could have happened. And God stands there, facing it all, taking its full measure, summing up the entire disaster, covering all its length, and breadth, and depth, and height; pronouncing the doom of His own work, of His own hope, so far as that first creation was concerned; very quietly, very seriously declaring the terrible fact in its naked exactness. "An enemy hath done this."

And that Divine sorrow of the Garden must yet again be rehearsed by the Son, Who, now in the wilderness of our sin, is breathing life into the new body which He has prepared once more for Himself, in His own image, out of the dust of earth. A new creation—that is what He is forming; a kingdom of heaven, filled with His breath. Ah! the joy, the rapture, of its outburst! the joy of the Creator, Who pronounces it very good! “I thank, thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth;” “I beheld Lucifer fall from heaven.” Yet He has no illusions. Though He bruise the serpent’s head, the serpent will yet bruise His heel. Though He secure the growth of the good seed, the tares will yet be found in their midst. He looks on at his infant Church; and already, though it has hardly passed out of His hands, it will be finding a lie in its midst—a lie spoken in the face of the Holy Ghost. It will find the seeds of old dissensions and of passionate jealousies. It will find the old lusts sown thick up and down the fair field of the Church. Evil growths, horrid, fetid, abominable, will start up in holy places. The sweet and gracious peace of Pentecost—that bright dawn, when all were of

one heart and one mind, and had all things common—it would fade and pass away, and for ever! Never more that tender ease; never more that unshaken confidence; never more that untroubled love; never more that blessed, blessed unity!

No! if the root of ill be once lodged within the body, it cannot be torn out. The risk is too great. It must be left to grow and spread there, right unto the very end of the world; right unto the last harvest! How pitiful, how cruel, the ruin of such high promise! How maddening the success of the foe, the shame of his victory! Yet our Lord was not driven into violence, or impotent wrath. It was the worst; but He had faced it, and known it, and measured it. He stands there, in Galilee, foreseeing it all; and therefore there is a calm, a reassurance, a strength, in His steady recognition of all that it meant. A calmness which can do something to steady our troubled imagination. "An enemy hath done this!" His kingdom of heaven will find it happen. And, once done, it must be accepted, and cannot be undone. Wheat and tares, melancholy mates! "They must both grow together until the harvest." So He quietly declared.

“An enemy!” The calmness in the phrase seems to come out of the recognition of the evil’s origin. It is the work of “an enemy.” Our rage at evil belongs, I suppose, to our feeling that it is all a stupid blunder that has happened. It strikes us as so senseless, so unlucky, so blind and silly. Here is a world that ought to be bright and happy; that is full of hope, and exultation, and high adventure, and glory, and joy. And, somehow, it all goes wrong. It gets in a foolish tangle. It stumbles into the mud. It takes the wrong turn. Misfortunes beset it by a sort of fate. Accidents perversely befall it. Everything is upset, crossed, obstructed. And all through some ignorance, or carelessness, or folly. Nobody meant it. So always the happiness which man pursues eludes him by a slip, by a chance. The goal is always just missed, as in a nightmare. It is all some hideous mistake; it cannot be intended. These barbarities that are wreaked upon poor suffering man, these pains, sorrows, troubles, are all blundering accidents, irrational, foolish, unintelligible, that ought not to have happened. That is what we feel; and, so feeling, we are irritated. We are furious; we violently protest, as we

wake up each morning, to look at our gay field of corn; and lo! the tares again in our midst. In every field we sow, in every hope we cherish, in every plan we make, in every good we pursue! The wretched tares—to wake up and find them there! Just where we thought we really had excluded all chance of their appearing; just where we had secured such a delicious bit of healthy gladness; and we had cleared the ground so carefully, and we had put in such good stuff; and now, to look at it spoilt, smirched, disgraced! The old tiresome, unhappy mischance has repeated itself. How meaningless! how provoking!

That is the temper that gets excited, angry, mad, at the recurrent evil. It is mad with anger, because it has no explanation to give of what has happened.

Now, it is true, dear people, that much of the evil under which we suffer is due to our ignorance, to our folly, to our criminal carelessness, to our reckless indifference. We know well how much of the disease, *e.g.*, that fills our hospitals with pain, follows on the sheer stupidity of our selfishness, which invites fever, and diphtheria, and cholera; through the

sluggishness of a landlord's conscience ; through the ignorance in which we all are content to be of our neighbour's way of living, until it is we ourselves who are imperilled by the results. The tares in our neighbour's field do not distress us so poignantly until they begin to spread into our own. This is true enough—far more largely true than we are accustomed to allow ; and perhaps it might be well if here, in this department of evil, there were a little more irritation on our part, a little more fiery indignation, than is usual to us, both against others and against ourselves, who permit so much good to be needlessly wrecked.

But, allowing for all this, it is well to follow our Lord a little deeper into the mystery. Down below all the hubbub of wrongs which are accidental, which are due to no necessity, which have come from carelessness or folly or neglect or sloth,—down below, if you search low enough, you come upon a thing altogether different in kind, upon a thing not easily realized. Our Lord detects it, unearths it, points it out with clear and deliberate emphasis. What is it? Look close ; examine it. It is an evil will. A will, that is, which means to do evil ; and does it because it means it. A will which,

of choice, prefers evil to good. A will which dislikes good, finds it distinctly unpleasant and repellent. It is the will of an enemy, who intends to damage God, Who is the Father of goodness; who intends to oppose God; an enemy, conscious of this enmity, feeding on it, acting on it as a motive, "rejoicing in iniquity," hating what God loves, loving what God hates; and who, in that hate and in that love, puts out his force in defiance of God, watches for a good on which God has set His heart, in order that he may have the pleasure of wrecking it; sows tares out of no other motive but that of spoiling God's wheat.

"An enemy of God!" A will that has grown to love evil for evil's sake! We are startled at such a revelation. It staggers our belief. We are so sure of our own good intentions even in our worst acts, and we are so keenly alive to the sentiment that there is nothing human which is not part of us, that we recoil from this conception of a Satanic will with peculiar vehemence.

Yet there are few matters on which our Lord has spoken with such directness and certainty as this. He is continually conscious

of a presence in which such a will is realized ; a will that wars with God ; a will set over against His good will ; a will that loves a lie, loves darkness, hates light ; a will that, out of hate, stamps under and crushes and kills good ; a will that is "the father of lies," "a murderer from the beginning ;" a will that killed the Prince of Life.

And it is this consciousness that keeps Him calm in the presence of evil. Evil does not come before Him as all a stupid and provoking blunder which He cannot tolerate. Nay! much of it is quite intelligible, accountable. Is it astounding to you to find those tares in the wheat? Oh! He is not startled. He knows perfectly well how they have come there! They spring up by no strange, blind perverse fate ; they are simply the familiar signals of the old foe, the natural incidents of a recognized war. He has come on earth to face and fight an enemy. And no soldier is surprised because his enemy attacks him, or springs upon him an ugly trick, or does his best to damage his army. For He has entered on the war prepared for this. What else would He expect? Wherever He goes, the enemy will follow. And He must take the losses of

the fight with a soldier's courage. It is part of the stern game that He is set to play.

Yes! it is the soldier's quiet patience which is in the Lord—the patience which is aware of all that may befall, and is disconcerted by nothing; and lightly accepts the cruel disfigurements, which are inseparable from a life lived in face of a relentless and unscrupulous foe. It is this brave patience which enables the Lord to recognize so temperately the ruinous wrong which has befallen His kingdom. “An enemy hath done this.”

So our Lord pronounces, gazing, far beyond our narrow horizon, into the lowest abyss of sin. It is a living, breathing enemy whom He sees there. And, my brethren, is it so impossible for us to recognize something of what He means? Is it so rare as we fancy in men and women—this direct repugnance to good, this plain enmity with God? The great dramatic students of human nature do not, anyhow, agree with us. Shakespeare did not think it an impossible experience when he drew Iago; nor does Iago, so drawn, fail to justify himself to us as a real human character. Consider Iago, so pleasant, so tolerant, so easy-going, so boon a companion; yet with a heart

as cold as ice, and a will as cruel and biting as steel, and an intellect that is bitter as a frost, and an imagination acid and venomous ; Iago, with his cynical contempt for all honour and purity and faithfulness ! We see how such things provoke him ; they challenge him to show them up as shams ; he cannot rest until he has contrived to wreck them ; and this for no other reason, except that they are what he dislikes, what he despises, what he hates. Consider him ; for that is the devilish temper—the mind of the enemy of God. Shakespeare knew it.

And George Eliot did not have to go as far as Venice, with its fanciful fairyland, to come across the same moral phenomenon. She found it in London drawing-rooms, in the most familiar atmosphere of modern society. She laid it out for us in Grandcourt, whose hard, impenetrable selfishness has eaten up all good elements, until he has become a merciless hater of all that does not serve his own gratification. There he is, with no instinct left in him that is open to an appeal from the side of goodness. And yet he is human enough, natural enough. As we read the tale, we seem to know him quite well.

And Robert Browning, the great optimist, who spent all his dramatic power in unravelling the secret good which underlies human character in its mixed developments,—even Browning, on whom an evil character acted like a challenge, daring him to discover its root of right, yet, in the “Inn Album,” gives us one picture—and that a modern one, taken from present social life—in which the will of the man holds nothing sacred, nothing in reverence, but deliberately, with the devouring savagery of a wolf, preys on all that is tenderest and holiest in the human heart. Here is a man whom we can recognize as one of ourselves, who yet regards love and pity and loyalty as things to be destroyed. He regards their discomfiture, their ruin, as a sport that he enjoys for its own sake. His instinct is to murder them.

So the terrible figures stand before us in fiction. And is it only in fiction? Is it only there that the flame of an awful hate suddenly shoots up its tongue of fire? Surely, no one who has ever worked for the advance of public righteousness, has failed to discover that, after he has got through all the opposition that comes from prejudice or indifference or

misunderstanding or timidity or hesitation or natural doubt or the weight of custom or the resistance to change as such, he will find, bestirring itself against him, an hostility of a wholly different type. This underground hostility will not show its colours while the more innocent opposition is still strong ; but if that begins to yield, if the good cause appears likely to win, then it emerges, it throws off its disguise, it comes out into the open. It is an hostility that is the concentrated passion of evil men—fierce, terrifying, merciless ; the passion of men who do not want righteousness to advance, who desire to retain the vice as it is, who love the darkness and hate the light. Surely we have caught sight of such a thing as this ! Believe me, it is there, and we cannot afford to ignore it.

Or, again, there is, at the core of the worst sensuality, a temper formed, that looks out of men's eyes at us now and then in the street ; a temper that gloats in the ruin of purity ; gloats in the tales that tell of how the victory over innocence was won ; gloats in the news that another young fresh life is lost and broken, another tender soul has been sucked under. I know nothing so horrible as those eyes ; the

eyes as of a hound that has tasted blood ; the eyes of a soul surfeited in lust. Such eyes make one start as if the ordinary shell of respectability had been broken, and, from behind, a hidden self had suddenly shown itself ; a self unsuspected, dreadful, wolfish, hungry for sin as a wild beast. Horrible ! It is the enemy of God who is there, in his hiding-place.

And indeed, beloved, if we look well within ourselves, there is an ugly spot we often reach. Is there not a strange envy of moral goodness in others, which now and again shocks us at ourselves ? Why are we so pleasantly satisfied at the creeping slander which destroys a high reputation ? Why this contentment that some good has been pulled down—that it does not stand quite so high as it claims ? We catch ourselves being pleased at these things. It makes us comfortable to find that, after all, the best people have their weak points. And, then, a real scandal always captivates. It has a most curious interest, though it has nothing on earth to do with us and does not concern us in any way. Yet, surely, it is a horrid, base, cruel self which comes forward to enjoy it ; this self in us which is gratified to learn that the tares are there in the wheat—gratified at

the success of him who has sown them so cleverly. Why should we have that in us which laughs, with the enemy of God, at the trick he has played? I fear that there is worse stuff in us than we quite imagined. This is not the sign of a will that is weak, or that fails, or that blunders, or that is tempted aside, or that lapses from a good intention. No; it is a will that feels a pure glee in evil as such.

Brethren, let us be downright and frank with it. There is an enemy of God abroad in this world; and, in recognizing that, in facing the worst, we renew our calm. This earth, this human life, ceases to appear as a scene of mad confusion, in which good is for ever tumbling into stupid blunders, which God ought, surely, to have made impossible, or, at least, to set straight. It is a battle-ground, and there is a foe in face of us; a foe bent on spoiling our good, on hurting us, on ruining our golden corn. He will get his hand in, here and there; we shall expect that. Our fondest hopes will suffer from his attack; our best work will be touched by disappointment. Yet what a relief, as we look at some cruel disaster, at the broken fragments of some joy, dearly loved, to say,

not—"Oh, why has God done it? Why has He smitten me?" or, "Why this horrid accident, this needless misfortune?" but—"The enemy has done this—God's enemy and mine. Not God, but the one who hates God, and hates good, and hates what I have done for God. It comes from him, this blow; it is a piece of his malice. God hates it as much as I do. It is against Him, against His honour, that it is done—in open hostility to Him. God and I, therefore, stand together in a common misfortune, in a common sorrow, warring against a common foe!"

"The enemy has done it!" As we say it, our stronger manhood rises to the ring of the war-cry. "The foe is on us! Help, in the Name of the Lord!" No longer whining, complaining, protesting, we brace ourselves as soldiers, called to a sterner work. We set our faces like a flint.

Do you ask, Why a foe at all? Ah! that is not now our question. This parable is not concerned with that. Only it is clear that a foe there is; a foe who does things against God—hated of God, hated by us. And this, too, is clear, that God (though He does not now remove the foe) enters Himself into the fray against

him, sets Himself by our side, bends Himself to baffle and defeat him, pledges to us the Divine succour which can never fail.

In the heat and stress of the battle it is not the time to inquire why we have to fight. Enough that fight we can. Enough for us to know that God fights with us. Enough for us to know that it is out of His fear of losing the least grain of golden wheat that He refrains from plucking up the tares. Enough for us to be sure that God will, of His great power, turn the worst losses that the enemy has worked into gain, if we will but throw ourselves in a fuller faith upon His crucified Son, Whose agony and bloody sweat were indeed brought upon Him by the wickedness of the enemy, and yet were wrested out of his wicked hand, and made the instruments of man's salvation and God's glory.

V.

THE FISHING-NET.

“The kingdom of heaven is like unto a net, that was cast into the sea.”—ST. MATT. xiii. 47.

FISHING ! Here is a curious and startling symbol for the kingdom of heaven. It is a craft for catching and killing. It traps creatures into wholesale death. And the poor things themselves are so absolutely harmless. Yet it is capable of even hunting them by guile, adding to the cruelty inherent in all sport, the malice of deceit. And this deceit makes its attack through the innocent and necessary needs of food. It uses bait. It conceals its artifice under the cover of a natural delight. It tempts through that which is most instinctive. It turns nature itself into a heartless ambush, into a barbed betrayer. Therefore it is that on this its cruel side it has supplied the bitterest

images of all that is most cruel in wrong. The hook, and the net, and the snare,—these are types, familiar enough, of the worst that hate, and spite, and wickedness can work. They carry with them a bad sound. “As the fishes that are taken in an evil net, . . . so are the sons of men snared in an evil time, when it falleth suddenly upon them.”

It is in the waters what the snare of the fowler is to the birds of the air. It belongs to a class of things which, whether in land or water, embody all that is most underhand and fierce and foul; the net in which a man's foot is caught, the snare on which he walks, the trap laid in the way, the gin that catcheth him by the heel. All this makes a heavy case against fishing.

And yet we all know how much romance—yes, and of the sweetest, most delicate, most exquisite romance—lies always round and about this art of fishing. A strange charm haunts the gentle craft. A touch of high and subtle pleasure there is in it, in spite of its underlying guile—a fragrance of tenderness, of mild and soothing peace.

It has been so for us since old Isaac Walton sang its beautiful praises, and made its honour

classical for all English ears and hearts ; Isaac Walton—

“With his divine tranquillity,
And all his pleasure in the dewy flowers,
The meads enamelled and the singing showers,
And shelter of the silvery willow tree,
By quiet waters of the river Lea.”

He has made fishing the type of the gentle mind, that finds, even in the midst of hot and angry tumults, a refuge for quiet hours, a haunt of peace by happy river-sides.

“For he, like us, had trouble for this realm
Of England ; for his dear Church mocked and rent ;
His friends in beggary ; his monarch slain.
But nought could his mild spirit overwhelm !
Ah, Father Isaak ! teach us thy content,
When time brings many a sorrow back again.”

So entirely is the malice of the baited hook vanished and forgotten, under the fascination of that delicate temper which is bred in the sweet companionship of rippling waters and of silent pools !

And then we English have in our life-blood the light and the glory of the fisherman's craft, as it fares in the deep seas. The painters, the poets, the story-writers, all find here the spring of our deepest feelings, the touch of nature which makes all Englishmen akin. Ah, how well we know it all ! from the

days of our first wondering boyhood, when, by the sea, we saw him—the figure already so familiar by rumour and poem and picture; bluff and ruddy (as Hook paints him) over against the green wash of the sea; the big leather boots, the blue jersey, the flapping sou'-wester; the man, weather-beaten, hardy, seasoned, with the kindliness of the peasant in his homely face, but with some strange alertness in those eyes that no peasant possesses—the alertness of eyes ever on the watch for squall and blast; eyes that have scanned wild scenes, and faced untoward adventures; eyes that hold the wind in them still. What had he not been through? How near had he been to death! We wondered, in awe. And, as we grew up, we found him ever the same—cheerful, hearty, refreshing; taking wind and weather, storm and calm, with an equal mind.

And never do we tire of gazing at the boats that go sailing into the west—

“Into the west, as the sun goes down;”

nor lose the vague alarm that haunts the light-house tower—

“Where they trim the light, as the sun goes down;
And look at the squall and look at the shower,
As the night-rack comes rolling up ragged and brown,
And the harbour-bar is moaning.”

Surely here is scenery that never loses its poetic glamour for us. The fisherman is almost the only figure which, amid our drab industrialism, retains all its old romance in the act of doing its daily modern work. And so long as our coasts are full of fishing-harbours, English life will have in it the soul of perennial beauty.

We, then, are easily and commonly able to disengage the art of fishing from all that is harsh or ugly or malicious in its pursuit. And we need not, then, be so surprised to find that our Lord felt what we feel, and recognized what we recognize. He, too, was sensitive to the vivid and picturesque surroundings of the craft. He entered deeply into all its romantic imagery. The fisher, with his nets and his boats, as he stole out over evening waters, while the sun sank behind the hills ; as he toiled all through the silent night, while the long hours dragged on, and still he caught nothing ; as the morning broke over the mountains to discover him there, hauling in his nets, fagged, yet unrepining ; as he raced home before the rushing squall ; as he trembled under the buffeting waves that rose and thundered over him, until his boat began to fill ; or as he sat quiet and at ease on the

brown shore, mending at leisure his broken nets ; or, again, as he felt, after weary delays, the sudden draught of fish swarming into the net until it strained to breaking, and it was all he or his struggling mates could do to bring the great haul to land ;—the fisher, in all his varied fortunes, was the constant and welcome and favourite sight on which the Lord's eyes fastened with enjoyment. He lived close among them at Capernaum, and was familiar, in His daily experience, with all the business, and the adventures, and the skill, and the excitements of the life.

In a beautiful story written lately by an American author,¹ it is told how a poor boy, half-witted, yet with a curious and wonderful instinct for the ways of fishes, and with a knowledge of fishing which few could surpass, was drawn suddenly to Christ, by hearing in a sermon how He was One Who knew all about the fish, and could read the subtle signs of their presence, and could detect, even when those familiar with the craft all their lives failed to notice it, the moment at grey dawn, or tender twilight, when the net ought to be let down, and the great draught might be caught. So

¹ "Fishing Jemmy," in "Seven Dreamers."

the boy owned a Master in the craft he loved so well, and from that hour gave up his soul to the service of Jesus, the Fisher of men.

And then, again, as our Lord was sensitive to the imaginative romance of the fisherman's life, so, too, He felt deeply, as we do, the interest of the fisherman's character. That simplicity, that sensitiveness to external impressions, that natural delicacy, that spiritual touch, which we love in him, drew our Lord's heart towards him with peculiar force. Here was the truest and purest type of the man He needed. Here He found His special friends. Whether it was Andrew, with his straightforward modesty; or Peter, with his eager simplicity; or James, with his rush of zeal; or John, with his mystical passion;—it was still in fishermen that He sought and won the four chiefs of those to whom He trusted His whole secret. Something there was in the characters bred among boats and nets, in the companionship of those mobile and exquisite waters, which tuned them to the key in which the music of His Voice spoke home. These were the men who best felt and understood Him. These were they who could bring Him the finest service.

Fishers of men! That is what He would

make of them. Fishers ! Not to trap into death, but to entice into life, would their old craftsmanship now be exercised. All that was cruel, ugly, slaughterous, malicious, in it would be purged out of it. But, nevertheless, the same temper as had been theirs in the old days would be their instrument still ; the temper of the fisherman—simple, frank, quick, susceptible, impressionable, open-eyed, hearty, patient, trustful, enduring, religious. This is their temper. This they had gained in their intercourse with sky and wind and water. This would stand them still in good stead to make them true fishers of men.

And beyond this, a deeper thought, a richer suggestion, lay in the analogy. There was something in the setting of the picture which peculiarly symbolized the relation in which our Lord brought His work to bear upon mankind.

Look at that fisherman's boat floating there on the waters ! The men are poised by it above the element in which they work. They breathe their normal air. That is their sphere to which they belong. Yet, thus suspended, without leaving their natural conditions, they overhang another world, deep, hidden, mysterious, within which life in other shapes moves

to and fro. Down into the dim depths of these silent waters their patient skill finds a way. Down sinks the subtle net, through which they from above range over and penetrate these covered places. Out of one world they reach down to their work in another.

And, then, what a venture it is that they make! How uncertain the success! How mixed the captures! They must, for the sake of catching something good, risk catching with it much that is bad. They must make wide and daring casts. Below, in the silence, far down, the dim waters teem with swarming life, and they, above there, cannot mark down what they need, or select the best. So they must embrace everything for the chance of including the prize that they seek. They must risk it, dragging the great net along so that it sweeps in all that comes in its way; a strange medley, a confused heap—fish of all types and sizes, and lumps of seaweed, and floating fragments, and shells, and all that tangled growth, that conglomerate living matter, which breeds and feeds in the deep sea. All must be carried along in the drag of the net. Heavily it strains and pulls, as the boat moves with it toward the shore. More and more stuff it gathers as it goes. But

what is it they have caught? Who can say? They must not stop to inquire; they cannot sift or count the gain. They may peer over the side of the boat, but nothing betrays the covered secret. No sound, no clear sight; only a sense of a struggling mass, that draws with ever weightier volume upon their sturdy arms. Only at the land will they know what it is of which the net is full.

Such is the scene that you might watch over and over again on the shores of the Galilean sea. Such was the experience which was familiar as their daily bread to hundreds of the very men who thus stood listening to the Master as He sat and taught them from the boat.

And just like that was the work of the kingdom of heaven. "The kingdom of heaven is like unto a net, that was cast into the sea, and gathered of every kind: which, when it was full, they drew to shore, and sat down, and gathered the good into vessels, but cast the bad away."

The kingdom of heaven! It was let down into a lower element out of a higher plane of existence. Up above, in the upper air, was its spring and source. Up there was its guiding

Mind, its controlling Hand, its living Strength. Up there, uplifted, upborne, in the clear radiance of the heavenly light. For it was a kingdom of heaven ; belonging to heaven ; from heaven ; issuing out of heaven—out of a far and wonderful land, as different from the earth into which it lowered itself, as those fair hills and nestling houses that crowded round the shores of the Galilean lake were from the dusky, dark, and shrouded waters into which the net sank. Up into heaven must you go to find the secret of this kingdom. Its hopes, its aims, its intentions, its significance,—all were there. Not in within the waters ; but up above, in the higher air.

And what can the fish make out of this filmy web that is discovered to be slowly encircling them? What can they understand of what is going on up there in that boat, which casts its blue shadow on the water? What is it all for? What strange presence directs this net as it moves? Whither does it draw them? What can they be wanted for? What will be the end?

So, out of some hidden height of light and air, comes dropping down among men the net of the kingdom. A film encloses them—so faint and so delicate they hardly perceive it, yet so

tough and strong they cannot break it. Somehow, it has folded itself round them. Who and what directs it? Why is the cast made just there, not somewhere else? Who can say? Only it is come; it has enwrapped this or that portion of the waters. A mysterious pressure begins to make itself felt, drawing all towards one direction. At first only suspected and half ignored, gradually the movement grows more decided. All are huddled together in a growing heap; all are pushed on and on, whether they will or no. What is it that determines what is happening? Up above is something—is some one. Nothing is distinct, nothing is decided, except the steady drag that none can resist, as it sweeps forward the entire mass that it has covered.

And what an odd mass it is! What strange bedfellows have come together! What a disorderly mingling of materials! All forms and types of human life—good, bad, and indifferent—are caught in a tangled lump. Nothing that falls in this net's way seems to come amiss. It will have all. It does not attempt to distinguish or select. All human life, just as it is, is taken in and included and thrust along. Heavily the great net drags, as more and more

stuff is pushed in and pulled together. Weary, surely, are the arms that hold it and draw it. Will they bear the gathering strain?

And how silently the whole movement proceeds! There is a dim throb, now and then, of the struggling mob, that is half frightened at the mystery that has embraced it. That is all—as the vast motion of the kingdom bears along with it entire nations and peoples, pressing them together, swaying them with a slowly developed purpose; forcing them, with a persistence that is gentle as the wind, yet deliberate and irresistible as iron, towards some distant goal of its own, towards a shore that no human eye has ever yet seen.

That is the kingdom of heaven, as it will work in the thick of human history. That is the way and method of the Church—the Apostolic Church which was founded through fishermen. “It gathers of every kind!”

My brethren, these pictures of the Church, whether of the wasted seed or the tangled net, are certainly not given us in order that we may sit down contented with the miserable disorder into which Christ's kingdom is fallen. We are not to soften the stings of shame which should burn within us, as we look round on

the desperate tangle in which Christendom is caught ; or look within, at the evil and alien growth with which our own Christian life is hopelessly intermixed. Bad, and gross, and foul, and ugly are the elements that, unhappily, lie huddled up together inside the covering lines of the kingdom of God. They ought not to be there, and we men are responsible for their being so thick and wrong. No ! not to encourage us in any slothful acquiescence in evil condition, are these parables of the Lord spoken to us out of the boat. But they are told us to prevent our supposing that God has failed to foresee or to measure the task to which He set Himself. They are told us to show that He has discounted the risks He chooses to run. They are there to assure us of the large width of His hope ; of the deep determination with which He is prepared to go through with His mighty venture, at whatever cost by the way. They are told us to relieve our anxieties at the mixed and doubtful progress that Christ's Church makes ; at the wickedness that is borne along within the broad sweep of the Christian movement ; at the base things tolerated by God, uncast out, unexpunged, ever in the heart of His Church.

Ah! be not alarmed (so these parables say to us), as if God's Arm had been shortened. This Church of His was to be a bold experiment, a wide cast, an immense venture. God allowed for that. He will let it down, as a net, into the midst of these seething waters, here on earth. He will not ask yet, too curiously, what it is covering or collecting. No; better let it gather of every kind. Let it sweep in everything that comes in its way. Let it cast itself, with a vast throw, round the nations as they swarm past. Let it lay hold, within its encompassing meshes, of all human nature, just as it stands, in its wild, mixed moving turmoil. Let it set itself to give the whole mass a certain direction—to drag the whole forward by unintermittent pressure. Such shall be the method.

So the great drag-net of God sweeps through England to-day, catching up and bearing along whatsoever things, indeed, are fair and pure, lovely and of good report; but also, alas! so much—so terribly much—that is gross, and worldly, and selfish, and base, and unprofitable. There it all lies, in a heap, like a wet tangle of seaweed, and shells, and slime, and creeping things. How godless it looks, how repugnant!

How unworthy of the Name of Jesus! Yes! and it is so long, so drearily long, before it will reach the far shore, when, at the close of man's story, it will be brought at last to land, and the angels will sit down, and sort, and sift, and gather the good into God's house, and throw the bad away! Long, long centuries drearily pass in strife and sin; and still the drag-net of God hangs low in the dim waters, heavily loaded, deeply sunken, gathering as it goes of every kind, good and bad alike. And never the shore seems nearer; never the day of sifting dawns.

Does that sound cheerless—a disheartening message to be preaching in the house of the Good Father? Nay! not cheerless, not unkind. For it is this long delay which allows us our opportunity. It is the forbearance, and mercy, and tenderness of God the Father which suspends the decision, which prolongs the interval. Remember, oh, remember, that day on the shore—that day at the end of the world, when the great net will be brought in—that day which must, perforce, put an end to this intermingling of good and evil which now leaves us at ease.

Beloved, can it be that you or I are rely-

ing on the prolonged intermingling which now forbears to disturb us; and are trusting that, as nothing comes now to violently displace us from our place of privilege, therefore we shall get through all right on the great day? Are we taking advantage of God's merciful temporary concession, and secretly imagining that, as it is now, so it will be always? Now we are glad to think that we are in the net. Now we are covered by the cast God has made. The vast folds of the kingdom embrace us in their meshes. We move along in the company of those who make up the Church of God. We are carried in the mass which the pressure of God's net draws towards the eternal shore. But is that enough? Can we rely on that? This undisciplined, unsifted, unsorted Church, as it is now, lays no forcible strain upon us. Nothing puts us to open shame. Many men are, no doubt, better than we; but some are worse. We shall do; we shall pass in with the rest. Ah! do we learn to think that? Do we win a false confidence? Is that the temper bred in us? If so, we deceive ourselves. The kingdom of God, no doubt, now, is like a net which gathers of every kind. But there is a shore;

and it must, at last, be touched. And then it will not, it cannot, be as it is now. Then the judgment of God, so long in His pity suspended, must of necessity be set at work. It must distinguish; it must select; it must pronounce. For though the kingdom of heaven, as it is here on earth, permits this confusion, this indiscriminate tangle, yet the kingdom of heaven, as it is in heaven, cannot admit confusion, cannot tolerate disorder. Nothing can possibly enter it that offends. "This ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of God." No! "there shall in no wise enter into it anything that defileth, or that worketh abomination, or maketh a lie. None can enter it"—it is spiritually, physically impossible—"but they which are written in the Lamb's Book of Life."

The net cast into the sea, gathering of every kind! It has gathered you, dear people. Its meshes are round you now. You cannot escape it. You have come under the sway of God's Word. You have fallen within the lines of the Divine movement. Christ's Incarnation has touched you; His Word has engirdled you.

Why—you may ask—why you? Why not others? Why is the action of God so partial? Why are there millions who have never come within hearing of it? Ah! that is not the question. The net is thrown into one part of the sea, not into another. God knows what He is about. The parable deals with one point only. It implies that the very question so put will be a natural one. It suggests an appearance of chance in the throw of the net. The kingdom of heaven will often look like a net cast at random into the sea. Some fish it wholly misses. The Fisher, up above there in the boat, knows why He thought it well to throw it here, and not there. He has His reasons. He has made His calculations. That is His affair. Leave that to Him. Anyhow, the net has been thrown, and has caught you. That is quite certain. And the only question that is urgent, in such a case, is, What are you going to do, now that it has covered you?

Let us consider, What is it that has really happened to you? Just this. You have fallen under the action of an impending judgment. That net draws you towards a shore where there must be a sifting. Never mind what

will happen to those not included in the net. For you, the whole process now tends immediately towards that work of disentanglement, of sorting, of judgment, which must be the end and issue of your present situation.

Are you, then, getting ready for those angels—those swift strong powers, which, with such deliberation, such decision, such final vigour, will set to work upon that tangled mass which the net has dragged to the beach? Does every movement, every pressure of the net, as it closes round you, compel you to face more definitely that uttermost act? Where will they put you—those angels of God? What will they do with you? Those eyes of fire, that pierce and burn—what will they see when they pick you out from the mass? For according to what they see to be there, they must adjudge you your portion.

Oh! it is a serious business towards which we draw; a most serious and searching hour! And the one fatal blunder is for us to suffer our present mixed condition to disguise from us that ultimate seriousness; a fatal blunder for us to look round and say, "After all, as things go, I am pressed along the right way in the general rough-and-tumble. Nothing

very strict, or high, or severe is asked of me now. Nothing is very alarming. I need not make a decision, when every kind of thing is so tolerantly permitted. My life is very mixed, no doubt; but all the life about me is the same. Good and evil—we all swim along in a single lump. I shall do. I shall make no effort; I shall hope for the best.”

So to judge is to make God's mercy a snare to trap us. In His mercy He hauls the great net slowly home—very slowly. But the eternal shore awaits us; when, out of the hidden depths of the shadowy waters, everything will at last come out into the daylight of judgment.

Ah! that eternal shore, on which the waves of this troublesome world ever roll and break! Would to God we were but ready now to face its blinding light, its dread and awful scene! Would to God that we would prepare ourselves now! Now, while the net still spreads wide and loose and slack; now, before the ropes tighten and the strain begins of the last haul!

Dear people, now is the time to draw the line sharp between right and wrong; to surrender the evil, which the strong hands of angels will pluck out and cast away, if we are ever to lie, white, clean, and untainted, in the vessel

of God. "Behold ! now"—during the suspense, in the hollow depths of the veiling waters—"now is the accepted time ; now is the day of salvation."

VI

THE MERCHANT AND THE PEARL.

“The kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant man, seeking goodly pearls.”—ST. MATT. xiii. 45.

JESUS CHRIST meets us by many roads and in many fashions. Whatever be our track in life, down that, if possible, He will come ; along that He will lie in wait for us. He will leave nothing unattempted by which He may win us into that kingdom of heaven whose frontiers He is ever seeking to push forward. Here in these parables He sketches some of the manifold shifts to which He is driven in order to reach us, the manœuvres by which He skilfully adapts Himself to our wayward and wilful vagaries.

In the parable of the treasure hid in a field, He told us how He would beguile and entrap the attention of those who do not suspect His

Presence, and are making no direct effort to approach or to discover Him—of those to whom all human life appears to be mere bare and common ground, without anything in it that kindles wonder, or prompts exertion, or suggests any exceptional secret. For such as these, as they plod along the conventional ways, as they toil through the routine of daily labour, His only chance is to hide Himself deep within this habitual commonplace world of theirs, as a treasure in a field, so that one day they may stumble up against it, and, by the shock of the abrupt surprise, may be startled into a mighty joy, in the throbbing heat of which they may rush off and act, and sell all that they have, if only they may buy that precious field. So the blessed snare is laid for them.

But there are others of another type altogether than these. There are those men who have never taken life as a plain and common affair; who have never accepted things as they come, with an easy indifference; to whom it has never seemed that everything is much of a muchness. No! there are men whose very instinct it is to make distinctions, to be critical, to be discriminating. They detect the good and the bad; they are alive to niceties of

difference. Their faculties are sensitive to all shades of excellence.

And they are this by nature, as we say. They grow that way. They have fine organizations, clean tastes, delicate nerves; they recoil from anything coarse, base, or ugly. Their minds are orderly and equitable; their judgment is balanced; their appreciation is measured; their perception is keen, and their zeal is ardent. Unlike those others who again and again passed over the field, without a suspicion, without a hope, of the hidden treasure, they, on the contrary, are all awake and on the watch. They live in expectation of a find, of a surprise. They seek after the exceptional and the peculiar. Wherever they go, they look below the surface of life. They have little interest in the multitude of conventional affairs; they pass all these by in their eager pursuit of some one rare prize—a prize, probably, not offered to their immediate gaze, but needing to be discovered, to be unearthed. This is what they hunt for, and, in comparison with this, all else may go to the wall for all they care. Their hearts are set on uncovering this excellence. They desire to win, out of each scene or experience, some perfection never yet

attained, some touch of grace, some breath of fragrance, which shall stand alone, select and incomparable.

There are such men as these, who go up and down this earth of ours as merchants who seek goodly pearls. And these, too, Jesus will follow after and entice, and captivate, if He may. Only they will require other methods than those by which He startles the unconcerned. To win them, the kingdom of heaven must take a different shape.

In the case of the unconcerned, the point lay in the violent contrast between that which they anticipated and that which they found. They fancied it was a field; they found a treasure. It was the last thing they looked for. In a moment, without apparent intention, without preparation, without exertion of their own, they are suddenly brought up short by the unexampled wonder. So they are shot over, as it were, by the extravagance of their astonishment, into the kingdom of heaven.

But now we have a totally changed manner. To the men who already are on the search for a wonderful and pre-eminent gift, the kingdom of heaven conforms itself to their anticipations; it takes the shape of that which

they pursue. It falls exactly into the line of their advance; it arrays itself in the vesture of their ideal.

They are not seeking *it*, indeed; they are seeking "goodly pearls"—seeking some precious thing, which seems to them the rarest and loveliest endowment of life. When, lo! in among their pearls—itsself a pearl—in the form of that which they value so dearly, not different in kind, but super-eminent in degree, goodliest among the goodly, rarest among the rare,—lo! there it lies, the kingdom of heaven.

There it lies! It is just what they dreamed of, only yet more perfect. It is just what they have loved in the treasures already amassed, only it surpasses them all in purity and in light. It has outdone them in their own chosen field. It has slipped itself in among their cherished favourites, and now these their former prizes look dull and dim by the side of this new radiance. Where they were brilliant, this strange arrival is more brilliant still; it stands alone among them; it is, in its solitary splendour, worth them all. And therefore the very instinct after excellence, which had sacrificed all lesser gains for the joy of winning

those jewels which before had charmed them, now bids them let all these too go, if only so they may gain that unique and paramount excellence which outweighs them all. True to their character, these merchants, who all along had been seeking goodly pearls, will, when they find one pearl of great price, go and sell all that they already have gained, and buy it.

To those who seek pearls, then, the kingdom of heaven reveals itself as the pearl of pearls—the consummation of their desire.

Again and again the truth of the parable was realized in the first ages of the faith, as those who had bent all their powers to the pursuit of intellectual truth found, in the gospel of the Word of God, the very truth itself which they had sought so long and so painfully. These men had toiled from point to point; they had never been satisfied with the common and conventional accounts by which the multitude lazily lulled their reason to sleep. These heathen philosophers had sifted their observations; they had interrogated their experience. They had indeed dived into deep seas, and had returned breathless with lurking treasures. They had secured most goodly pearls—clear, luminous, pure; and these they

had collected far and wide, wherever they could hear news of precious things. And much had been got together, all over the wide earth, in Egypt, India, Chaldea; and, above all, the merchants of Hellas had garnered from the deep the goodliest pearls of all—truths of the soul, of God, of thought, of the world, which perish never. And these pearls were the wonder and the glory of that ancient life. Men gazed at them with the bewildered fascination of children in front of something too beautiful to be endured. So fair, so radiant, so perfect, these goodly pearls of Greece! And then, as they pored over them, as they fingered them with reverent awe, as they passed from city to city to gaze at them, one day there would fall under their eyes, they hardly knew how, a vision of Truth that was like their former visions—"like, yet oh, how different!" It was the Truth as they had always pictured her, and sought for her. It tallied with all that Greek or Eastern had ever told them. It touched the same points. It answered the same questions. It used the like terms and phrases. It appealed to the same reason. It satisfied the like longings. It caught up all the old voices to which they

had listened so long. It was just what they had wanted. Only it was so much more—so far better, fuller, richer! By the side of its light, all else, that before had seemed bright, looked blurred and dim.

One of these seekers after truth has left on record the story of his first search and finding. Let us hear it in his own words. It is Justin Martyr, writing in Ephesus, probably about the year 136. He tells us of the old days, when he had first felt the longing to share in that wisdom which is verily the highest possession—"the most valued by God, to Whom it alone leads and unites us; for those are, indeed, holy who apply their minds to philosophy. . . . With this hope in my heart, I gave myself first to a Stoic teacher; but when I got nothing told me about God (for my teacher himself knew nothing, and professed that such knowledge was unnecessary) I left him, and went to another, a Peripatetic, who thought himself a clever fellow. He kept me with him for the first few days, and then asked me to fix a salary for him, in order that our intercourse might be profitable to both; at which I left him, not thinking him to be a genuine philosopher at all. But my soul

was still bursting with a passionate desire to hear the sweet and excellent secret of philosophy, and so I went to a famous Pythagorean." Then Justin tells how this man required of him the preliminary study of music, astronomy, and geometry before he approached the knowledge of the higher life, and how he could not bear the long delay ; and finally passed to a Platonist, who delighted him, and spoke of the Invisible ; "and quickly," he says, "I thought to become wise, and expected that, if it were not for my dull sight, I should be, in a moment, looking upon God !"

And then comes the crisis. "While I was in this frame of mind, one day I had a wish for quiet meditation, and so went to a bit of ground not far from the sea. And there, just as I was nearing the place where I expected to be alone with my thoughts, an old man, of a pleasant countenance, and with a gentle and dignified mien, came following me a little behind. I turned upon him, and stood still, with my eyes fixed upon him ; at which he said, 'Do you know me ?' I denied it. 'Why, then, do you look at me so severely ?' 'Because I am surprised to find you here, where I expected to find no one.'"

The old man explains that he is looking for some friends to return by the sea ; but why is Justin here? And then Justin explains why he has himself come to the lonely place. It is to meditate on the True Reason that governs all, uplifted by which he may look down from on high on others straying helplessly below, who do nothing sane or dear to God.

A long discussion follows, in which the old man convinces him of the uncertainty and insecurity of his teachers. "But if Plato and Pythagoras, the bulwarks of philosophy, fail, what teacher is there who can promise a more certain knowledge?" So Justin asks. And the old man replies that there have been men blessed, upright, beloved of God, who have spoken by the Spirit of God, and are called prophets. These alone have seen the truth ; not as reasoners about it, but as witnesses. "Pray, then," said the old man, "that the gates of this light may be opened too for thee ; for these things can only be seen and known by those to whom God and His Christ have given understanding."

Justin saw the old man no more, but in his soul the flame was fired, and a passion of love rose in him for those prophets, the friends of

Christ ; and as he turned it over in his breast, he became convinced that here, indeed, lay the one and only sure and worthy philosophy.

There it all is! The merchant, seeking goodly pearls, finds the one pearl above all price. His search carries him along the right path home. Jesus Christ meets him along the road he has chosen, in the guise of the very truth which he pursues. He has sought philosophy, and, as philosophy, Christ finds him—as a philosophy that surpasses all other philosophies in the exhibition of that very truth which they less perfectly embody. So he was met by the Christ. So the pearl of great price flashed in upon him, there by the lone seashore, where that quiet old man so strangely found him. And he was faithful to the vision. He lingered not, fingering his old treasures. He did not cling, in faint hesitation, to the great names of former teachers, deep as their charm had been to him. No! for they themselves had taught him enough to detect the supreme value of the truth now disclosed. He was true to their teaching, if he abandoned them all for the sake of the truth higher than theirs—the Truth itself. So he took his course once and for ever. He made his decision.

"He sold all that he had, and bought the pearl of great price."

So he became the first great Christian apologist. So he became the forerunner of many a like student in the Universities of Athens or Alexandria, in the Colonnades at Ephesus, or the Gardens of Rome; from Athenagoras and Clement down to Victorinus and Augustine. Some strong and simple words like those of St. John, "the Word was God," "the Word became flesh," broke in upon such men, as they mused and studied, with a force that overtopped all the wisdom of the schools. Here was the knowledge that turned to foolishness the wisdom of the world. Those who had loved Wisdom, those who had sought her, now knew her voice and surrendered all to her. "Wisdom was justified of her true children."

Nor was it only the seekers after the pearls of truth who have found in Christ their own garnered stores surpassed and shamed. The Greek artist who had sought far and wide the delicate and goodly pearl of beauty, hardly could have dreamed that, in this strange horde of Galilæans who crept away, with eyes askant and abhorrent, from the halls and heights where shone, in gold and ivory, or in tinted marble,

the calm splendours of the Pheidian gods, he would discover an ideal of spiritual beauty which would evoke in him a yet loftier and purer effort than that which owed its inspiration to Apollo or Athéné. Yet so it was to be. Goodly pearls, indeed, were those that already lay stored in the mind and memory of Hellenic imagination. But there was a pearl of yet more gracious delicacy, and of yet more enthralling charm, that was to disclose itself to those who could look beneath the covering that made the form of the Son of man appear, in contrast with the physical loveliness of youth and strength, to be "without beauty that we should desire Him." Born in a stable; wandering without a house in which to lay His head; scourged, mocked, and hung upon a tree;—He yet was to draw away from those fair Grecian deities, and to concentrate upon Himself, all the passion and aspiration of those imaginative men to whom beauty was all in all, and who found it transfigured to incomparable excellence in Him Whom they ever vied to paint, whether as a Babe on His mother's breast at Bethlehem, or as a dying Man, with wide arms of love outstretched upon the cross, or laid again as a white corpse, there

where He had lain as a Child, across His mother's knees, in the pathos of the Pietà. Here is the beauty that has conquered Art in its own field. Men sought beauty, and, to those so seeking, Christ offered Himself as the very Ideal in Whom Art may attain its crown and triumph.

Or, again, there were merchants of old seeking yet another goodly pearl—the pearl of righteousness ; men to whom the right conduct of life was a passion. Here, in moral goodness, they pursued the type of all that was most fair and excellent and of good report. Life was to be a dedicated thing, trained, perfected, polished, purified from disturbance, calm and clear. It was for this cause they lived, to make life itself worthy and exalted. What diligence, what pains, what study, they spent on this task ! Stoic, Epicurean, Eclectic, Neo-Platonist,—which could show the fairest work ? Which would you choose ? To which master would you give yourself ? These were the questions that agitated earnest souls, hungry for right. High and low, over sea and land, they sought the pearl of a good life, the treasures of moral wisdom. How startling it was, how overpowering the surprise, as there dawned upon

them the conviction that these same humble Galilæan folk had hold of some secret of holy living, by which peasants, and women, and children could attain to a moral peace such as Marcus Aurelius himself, the imperial philosopher, with all the resources of finest culture, and with the rarest opportunities of employing them, could with difficulty command! In him, this right conduct, this moral serenity, was anxious, strained, artificial, laborious. In them it was free, spontaneous, secure. How was this? Whence came it? The emperor, the type of these highest seekers, was indeed, as has been well said by a living writer,¹ "a master in the craft of self-direction. Yet it was, in truth, with him a melancholy service—a service about which one must needs move about, solemn, serious, depressed. Its forced optimism had no secret of genuine cheerfulness in it; it left a weight upon the spirits." But here, in these Christians, "there was the expression of a wonderful happiness, the blithe expression of a joyful soul—a people upon whom some all-subduing experience had wrought heroically. All that had been most valued in the ancient world seemed in them to be under renewal,

¹ "Marius," by W. Pater.

heightened and harmonized by some transforming spirit, which begat a unique expression of freshness, of animation, and of grave beauty. It was as if some profound correction and regeneration of the body by the spirit had begun, and already gone a great way, so that the very countenances of men, women, and children had a brightness upon them, an amenity, a mystic amiability and unction, a serenity of satisfaction, which contrasted very forcibly with the imperial philosopher's heavy burden of unrelieved melancholy." So, in Marius the Epicurean, Mr. Pater has drawn for us, with inimitable skill, the fascination of Christian goodness, as it showed itself to those who had touched the highest levels of Gentile morality. Here, in this hidden company of obscure men, was the thing so long sought by them, and so deeply desired. Here it was; only better, fairer, purer. Here it was, not as the rare privilege of the philosophic few, but as the open heritage of the mass. Here it was, not secluded and timid, in select corners, but bold enough and forcible enough to lay hold of all who most needed regeneration. Here, then, was indeed the hope of hopes, the treasure of treasures. Well

for those who were not afraid to let all their old moral stores go, however precious, that they might buy this one pearl of great price—the goodness, the holiness, of Jesus Christ.

Dearly beloved, here is the significance of our parable. If you start to seek high excellence in any department of human life, you will find this same Jesus crowning the very excellence that you seek. He can outdo your best anticipations. Where you look for goodly pearls, He will show you a pearl more precious than them all.

Is it truth that you are bent on winning; the satisfaction of the inquiring thought; the solution of the intellectual problems which this strange universe provokes? Follow along the road far enough, follow with zeal, with industry, with patience, and at last a Voice meets you, challenges you—the Voice of Him Who says, “I am the Truth”—“Abide in My Word, and ye shall know the truth; and the truth shall make you free.”

Is it beauty that you desire? Seek for it, in its highest, purest, tenderest form; seek with spiritual passion, with unflagging feet. And at last there is a vision shown you, in which

your longings are appeased—the vision of eternal loveliness in Him Who is the “Beloved, the chiefest among ten thousand, Who looketh forth at the windows, Who showeth Himself at the lattice, Who feedeth among the lilies, Who is altogether lovely.”

Is it goodness which enthrals you, the hunger after righteousness, the lowly necessities of duty, the need of the good conscience, clear and undefiled, of the controlled appetite, of the disciplined emotions, of the steady will, of the free and unencumbered moral nature, of the calm and serene hope? Ah! strive, with all your pains, to secure this—to win your upward way. And then it cannot fail but that, at last, high above the highest point that you will attain, will stand the Christ—the Christ, challenging you to convict Him of any sin; the Christ, supreme and spotless; and yet, not far above you in remote rebuke, aloof and inaccessible, but coming down close to you, inviting, welcoming, enfolding, saying, “Come unto Me; I will give you rest. Take My yoke, learn of Me; for I am meek and lowly of heart.” Yea! and more: “I am made unto you—within you—righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption.” In Him, you will gain the end of

all your restless efforts ; you will be found possessing, not your own righteousness, but the righteousness of God unto eternal life, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

But, no doubt, many here are confessing that they have not been as keen merchants, seeking goodly pearls ; not as artists, or poets, or moralists, who aspire after some special perfection ; not as seeking anything exceptional and select. They are travelling along common paths, with the main average mass. The promise of the parable has no application to them.

Well, perhaps not, in the fullest sense. But yet every one of us, who is worth anything at all, every one who is, in any slight way, loyal to his manhood, has some department of his life in which he covets a certain excellence. There is some direction in which he tries to be at his best, in which he does not like to fail. He has some virtue which he would not willingly let slip, some region in which he prides himself on keeping up to a good standard. He may confess to failures in other sections of his life ; but here, in this particular field, he holds fast a certain ideal. Perhaps it is honesty, perhaps it is truth ; in some, perhaps,

it is purity. Here, if nowhere else, he cherishes a treasure ; he fastens on a pearl.

Now, brethren, if so, it will often happen that just in that very department Christ takes us at our word—reveals to us a yet more excellent way. We catch sight of something better still than what we have done. The love of truth or of purity refuses to stop short at the point where we stand. It goes further ; it demands more—a stricter conscience, a cleaner heart. “Come up higher!” a voice seems to cry. “Come up higher!” If that is what you mean, you may do better yet. Look at what Christ asks of you, in matters of truth, of honesty, of purity. “Come up higher!” So the light breaks, harassing, convicting. So the complacency is disturbed.

And at such a moment there is a temptation to recoil, to protest. “Just in that direction I have already done so well ; I am level with the best of my fellows ; I flatter myself that few are so strict. Why am I to be fretted just there ? Why should I be made discontented with myself ? Why this new duty, call, suggestion, demand ? Why am I vexed with growing scruples, with dim self-complaints, with a sense that, after all, I have got but a very

little way?" So we revolt. The natural man sees how much good it has won. Why not be satisfied? Why seek the impossible?

Yet what is happening is, in reality, our reward from God for our previous efforts. We sought a goodly pearl; so Christ, in response, shows us a yet fairer one—His own pearl of great price. We have aimed at a certain moral standard of our own. Well done! Now look at His standard. Try your life by that. Test it. Does it stand? Does it still glisten with His white purity of light?

Ah! surely we have a long way to go yet. Christ overtops us just there where we most value ourselves. And it is His love for our gallant efforts that makes Him stir us with vague discontent at the dull, lack-lustre pearls that we have so laboriously collected; His love that still provokes us, by a sight of His own delicate jewel of great price, to go and sell all that we ourselves have won by our own effort, and, at any cost, buy His. This is His law, His method, that "to him that hath, to him shall be given." He draws us, by our good, up to His best; He challenges our better aspirations by something higher still. Because we have been faithful in little, therefore why

not in much? He loved the young man who had kept the commandments from his youth; and, because of that love, He asked yet more of him: "Sell all that thou hast, and give to the poor: and come and follow Me."

My brethren, when that challenge meets you, you cannot draw back without moral loss. If God has once shown you something better than your best, it is impossible for you to be as you were before. That which looked so good to you, before you saw this new sight, has become dim and spiritless now. It will not kindle joy or hope. The memory of that which is better still will rankle deep within—the memory of the holiness of Jesus, so far exceeding, so undefiled!

You cannot go back now. Your eyes are open. You see what might be. You see the more excellent way. You see the purity of heart that no cloud obscures. And that may be yours. You may be like that; for Jesus is yours; and what He is, you may be also, by His grace, Who gives Himself to you. Oh! if you ever catch sight of a higher, better self, of a purer peace, of a will more free, of a love more unselfish than what now is yours,—do not linger, do not delay, do not fear; make for the

very best that you can see! Go and sell all that you have, and win for yourself that rare and precious pearl, which is worth all the world beside ; even as that great Apostle who, though he was in all matters of the law blameless, and possessed all the highest privileges of the older covenant, yet cast it all behind him, and counted it as dung, that he might win Christ, and the righteousness that is from God.

THE STORY OF THE
KINGDOM'S COMING.

I.

THE MAKING OF THE KINGDOM.

"And the night following the Lord stood by him, and said, Be of good cheer, Paul : for as thou hast testified of Me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome."—ACTS xxiii. 11.

"THE Acts of the Apostles." We all are, perhaps, inclined to pass the book over, for one reason or another, with somewhat slight attention. It fails to arrest our attention with the vivid wonder which belongs to the other books of the New Testament. It seems to have dropped from that exalted beauty, that tragic passion, which endows the Gospels with their unique appeal. Nor does it speak home to the buried or startled soul with the fervid impulse of St. Paul. Neither has it the mystic glamour, the transfiguration, of St. John. And

it veils no tremendous secret, it stirs no imaginative awe, as does the Apocalypse. No! it is but a plain, matter-of-fact record of things done—a record troubled and crossed by perplexities and quarrels that have long ago lost for us their edge. Why this heat, this fury, all about meats and drinks, and unintelligible Jewish scruples, and circumcision, and the presence of Greeks in the temple courts? We cannot throw our hearts into the fray, when the points at issue have ceased to have the slightest importance for the present. So there is a drag felt by many of us in working through the Acts. Our spirits are not actively engaged as we read, or listen to, the tale. We sit by, and hear it all, with the mild interest of those who do not expect it to touch them very much, and who remain throughout personally aloof.

And yet there is hardly any book that could speak with such direct significance to our own day, to our peculiar temperaments. It is, in some ways, the book of the hour.

For what is it that we, of this generation, most sorely lack? Not spiritual appreciation of the message given in the Christian religion. We have this in abundance. We are pathetically open to it; we are sensitive to its beauty,

its tenderness, its depth, its peace. Never more so ! Our feelings rise to it ; our imagination welcomes it ; our spirits cry out for it ; our hearts are athirst. That strong and delicate Figure which fills the Gospel scenery with His majestic presence enthralls us, without difficulty or dispute, by the charm of its invocation. And the mysteries of the religious life—its psychology, its analysis, its anatomy, its struggles, its aspirations, its moral disasters, its spiritual victories,—these inner recesses of the emotional sphere, as disclosed to us by the great masters of the craft, St. Paul and St. John, are of absorbing value, of unflagging attraction to us. But there is one thing we lack—lack sadly, lack alarmingly ; and that is a veritable grip on the actual realities of religious fact. Our religion is so shadowy, so unstable—in contrast with our sturdy secular existence, every day and all day long. We are beset by the hard, solid pressure of this tough earth of ours. Facts cling us round with undeniable persistence. Science, history, criticism, all hammer on at the same old tale, Facts—facts—facts ! With the matter-of-fact common sense of children, they go on repeating, at the end of each delightful story that we tell

them, their monotonous test, "But is it real? Is it true? Did it really happen?"

It is so with everything now; all our inquiries have this one end. And it must be so with religion, as with the rest. Into religion we carry the mind which our daily experiences have moulded, and that mind cannot be put off with stories however lovely, or pictures however fair. In vain we flood ourselves with æsthetic religious emotion; we give ourselves up to the sway and entrancement of sacred music; we hang round our walls the exquisite treasures of Italian or Flemish art. No Mass of Beethoven, no Passion of Bach, can stave off the final problem. No quiet Madonnas, with sweet calm eyes, shining down out of mystical depths of light and peace, though they be charged with all the wistful outlook of Botticelli, or the twilight solemnity of Perugino, can still the anxious question, "Is it true? Was it real? Did it happen?"

Was it true? Ah! how each poor feverish soul battles with the doubt! How can it win its hold upon these mysteries? Mysteries, no doubt, there must be. It does not the least suppose it can solve them, or explain them away; yet was not the promise just this—that

these mysteries of God had clothed themselves in flesh and blood, and had entered in upon the scene of human history, and could be touched, and seen, and handled, and had made themselves actual facts, here and now, in the midst of those practical events that assert themselves with such positive force upon eye and ear and hand? The mystery was revealed, was manifested, in a man, in a body, in an event. It gave evidence of itself. Surely it still should verify its existence to us, here, in the light of the sun, here on the face of the earth. We want to be sure of it, as we are sure of other matters; to fasten on it with both hands; to lean against it; to support ourselves by it; to take of it; to eat it as bread, to drink of it as wine.

Now, just here it is that the Book of the Acts meets our need. Here we have come down from the high levels, from the exaltations and transfigurations. Here we are on the ground that we know—amid details, and incidents, and accidents, and circumstances that are all habitual and familiar. That air of the quiet commonplace which at first put us off the book, is what ought especially to draw us to it. This plain direct narrative, this careful information, this doctor's

journal, this traveller's diary—this, at least, lands us on the earth. This admits us behind scenes. This exhibits the gospel as it actually thrust its way along, in the throng of men, in the thick of dispute. This lets us watch it all happening. It invites us to inspect the slow, gradual, broken, difficult, experimental process by which the Church of Christ did, as a fact, grow, bit by bit, into its full and wonderful completion. We learn that it did not start up in a night like some magical palace, without the sound of saw, or axe, or hammer. Nay, indeed! the noise of the stone-yard is busy about us, as this temple of God is raised course by course. The axes smite audibly; the saw-teeth grind; the hammers beat; the cranes and pulleys creak and groan. With effort, with struggle, under pressure, in hot argument, in anxious uncertainty, in dreary disappointment, in weary delays, in crucial agonies, stone is laid to stone, and beam is fitted into beam. We watch these master-builders at their work. No easy Heaven-born task this of theirs! Things do not slide into their places, nor come together, at a rapid word. No! we see these men toiling, as we might toil; doubting, as we doubt; jarring, as we jar; stumbling, hesitating, distracted,

distressed, beaten, baffled ; yet still labouring, still carried through, still moving toward the goal. We learn what it actually meant, in real flesh and blood, for St. Paul to cry out, "We, Apostles, hunger, and thirst, and are naked, and are buffeted, and have no certain dwelling-place ; being reviled, we bless ; being defamed, we intreat : we are made as the filth of the world, and the offscouring of all things." We can translate this burning rhetoric into its concrete matter-of-fact details. We go home, as it were, with these Apostles. We have the comfort that came of old to those two wondering followers of the Lord who heard and accepted His invitation to His dwelling. "Come and see !" "They came, and abode with Him that day." So with us, and the chiefs of the Church. They take us by the hand in this book. "Come and see !" they say to us ; and we abide with them. We watch them in their houses ; or on a journey, or hungry, or sick, or tired. We go with this one into the tanner's house at Joppa, or we sit with that other as he sews his tents at Corinth with Aquila and Priscilla. We follow Rhoda to the door when that sudden knocking startles the household of Mark at their hidden prayers. We go down to the shore at Miletus

to say good-bye to St. Paul, weeping to see the ship draw off into the sea, and to feel sure, as we turn home, that he is right, and that we shall see his face again no more. All this we can follow, as if it were the story of a friend's adventures, as if we ourselves were there. It is within our compass; it is just what we can fancy happening; it is of a piece with our affairs, our experiences, our anticipations. It lays itself easily alongside of our imagination. It is concrete, human, intelligent. It commends itself to us as obviously real. It brings the faith of Jesus into line with the ordinary history that we are accustomed to touch.

And, then, we may remind ourselves, at this point, that this Book of the Acts, after fronting all the assaults of a battering criticism for fifty years—ever since the full force of Tübingen analysis was brought to bear upon it, under the idea of its hopeless inconsistency with the Epistle to the Galatians—has emerged with ever firmer triumph from the fray; and that now there is no book that more certainly carries us back to the eye-witness of the events which it records; and that the last word of criticism at this moment, in that candid and

delightful book of Professor Ramsay on Christianity under the Empire, has ratified the minute accuracy with which this book handles the tiniest details of Roman provincial government, and is attested by the latest researches into epitaphs and inscriptions which the soil of Asia Minor has now at last surrendered to our inspection. The book, it appears, could only have been written at the very time when these events which it narrates were within living experience. We can give it our joyful adherence, without a qualm or a suspicion.

The Acts, then, is the book to which all should turn who desire to realize how the Faith of the Cross verified itself on the field of actual history. It is the beginning of that Church history which passes without a break from the Day of Pentecost to our own times. It shows us how that process took its start within which we ourselves stand; how the vision in the Upper Chamber created the visible Church which we see about us to-day in England. It is the first stone of the bridge which reaches from Calvary to us.

Do we feel bitterly the commonplace, dusty, everyday look of this Catholic Church of ours, as we know it, which professes so high and

mysterious a birth? Do we find it hard to reconcile this flat and dry and very vulgar exterior with the mystic House of God, the assembly of the Firstborn, the Body of Christ? Well, the Acts shows how that mysterious Church did, as a fact, from the first take its place amid human affairs. It did not shrink from this existence in broad daylight; it did not fear the dust and heat and dirt that were bound to accompany such a public career. It stepped down into the open market; it clashed and jostled along; sometimes it succeeded, sometimes it contemptibly failed. It exposed its weaknesses; it got into nasty quarrels over troublesome widows, who complained that they did not get enough of the doles; it ran risks of loading its spiritual chiefs with the burden of financial accounts; it let irresponsible and reckless representatives say things in its name which it had afterwards to repudiate. Even its Apostles got across one another, and had sharp contentions. It had parties, and frictions, and collapses, and misunderstandings. Ah, as we read it all, how close and near it seems to us! What a relief to recognize that our wretched quarrels of to-day need not, necessarily, deny our affiliation with the primitive

scriptural Church of the Apostles ! How thankful we feel for the courage that has told us it out so plainly ! How totally devoid it is of all timid disguise ; of all that after-desire to picture the first days without a blot or jar ! How incapable of all illusion it is ! How practical, how actual, how frank ! How true to facts, to human nature, to life as we ourselves touch and taste it ! How comforting to have this rope let down to us to hold by in the great waters ! For still, through all the anxiety and trouble which makes it so akin to our conditions, it is the holy Church that grows and advances ; it is the Holy Spirit of God that inspires and controls. It is the Lord Jesus Who, from His throne, rules His kingdom. This is the result shown us. And we, too, therefore, for all our troubles, perplexities, and blunders, need not despair ; we need not doubt that still we have our Lord ruling in the midst of His people, and that still we possess the Holy Ghost, to rescue the Church from our confusions, and to hold it together in the unity of peace ; and to nourish it, by joint and band, so that it still makes increase with the increase of Christ.

The Holy Ghost ! The Acts is the Gospel

of the Holy Spirit ; the record of the activities of that Comforter Whom our withdrawn Master sent to us from the Father ; of that Comforter Who should abide with us, and lead us into all truth. This book rehearses how He came, and how He set to work to fulfil His mission. Yet how strangely unlike to our anticipations of His methods and His motions ! This spiritual guidance spares the Apostles nothing in the way of effort or pain, discussion or anxiety. They never know what is ahead ; they have to learn it all by daily experience. They feel their way along. Bit by bit they advance ; their own calculations, their own expectations, are again and again helplessly defeated. They travel to the very edge of disaster ; they move amid pitfalls and quagmires ; we tremble for their fortunes at each terrific crisis. All this is their lot still, though they be endowed with power from on high, though they possess the Spirit Who will guide them into all truth. The drama is real, the human interest is vivid, the agony is acute. Only, at each point of peril, the prompting of the Spirit is sufficient to carry them through it. Only, after each moment of painful suspense, they do, by the force of the ruling inspiration, take the right

turn in the road. This is the plot that we watch unrolling. This is the evidence of the Spirit's presence. We look on as at a ship that faces all weathers. The Divine action is not seen in arranging the weather to suit the ship ; nor, again, in foretelling to the crew what the weather will be. No ! let the weather be what it may ; now a fog, and now a calm ; now a favourable breeze, and now a howling blast. Always it is changing, always it is unanticipated. But one thing is sure, and one thing only. There is a steersman at the helm Who is never found at fault, never lacks nerve and strength and courage. On and on through His control the good ship fares. The winds roar, the waves buffet and bellow. But still she climbs the climbing wave ; still she breasts the foam ; still she plunges on into the gaping hollows ; still her groaning timbers hold ; still she beats up against the storm ; still she slides out at last into smooth waters ; still, by long and troubled tacks against adverse gales, she ever makes for the haven where she would be. This is how we know that God is with her. This is why the crew, though they feel her shudder under the buffeting seas, though the salt sea-spray beats against their faces, and in

the loud winds they scarce can hear each other speak, are nevertheless sure of their victory, and lift up their voices to praise their mighty Captain, Who sees to it that the powers of hell do not prevail.

Two instances are as striking as they are familiar, of this Divine steering, by which even the worst disappointments and most terrible accidents are pressed into the service, and are utilized to advance the vessel towards its goal.

In each of these, Jerusalem, by her attack on the Church, seals her own fate, and sets the Church free.

The first is the murder of Stephen. The second is that last ferocious onset upon St. Paul in the courts of the temple. In each the earnest efforts made by the accused at conciliation totally fail. Their appeals and apologies, instead of appeasing hostility, rouse it to fiercer fury. That fury stamps out Stephen's life; but, by that mad act, it only serves to inaugurate that large movement which carries the Church away, out of its early peace in the Holy City, into that wide Gentile world, where its glory awaits it.

And so, again, the passionate hate against St. Paul, roused by his speech, forces him to make

that appeal unto Cæsar, which brings him, through storm and shipwreck, to that very Rome, the great Gentile centre, which it was the object of his heart's desire, and of his Lord's promise, that he should reach.

Here, in these two instances, we observe the cardinal types of the victory of the Spirit. We see in these how everything that is human and real is retained in full activity. The complete play of passion and thought, of good and evil, of love and hate, goes on unchanged. No hard mechanic rule secures an arbitrary end. But a new power is shown to be at work in the thick of men's affairs; and this power, while submitting to all the pressure of accident and opposition and adversity and disaster, still utilizes each moment, as it arrives, for the steady purpose that it has ever in view. It never abandons its hope. It wrings its results out of this shock of jostling circumstances. It proves its mastery, not by selecting its own conditions, but by achieving its aims through the conditions made for it by human history.

Dearly beloved, in this matter the Book of the Acts speaks home to every one of us. It is our text-book, in which we can study the real mode in which the Spirit that comes from

Christ sets to work upon the material given Him, and introduces Himself into the heart of our practical lives. Here we can study it, not as in some far vision, some haunting but intangible dream, in which we picture ourselves as wafted along by spiritual ministries, in ideal peace, through the golden streets of an un-earthly Jerusalem ; but as it actually gives proof of its close co-operation with us from day to day, here as we work our way along the dusty streets of a crowded and rough and noisy London.

So long it takes us to receive this lesson ! Somehow or other, we cannot bring ourselves to reconcile our mixed and disturbed life, so open to misfortune, so hard-pressed by infirmities and blunders and accidents, with that high calling which is proclaimed to be ours in Christ Jesus. We know that we have a Comforter promised us, Who can never fail ; but why, then, we keep asking, all these anxieties that encumber us ? Why these depressions that besiege us ? Why these disappointments that sadden us, and discolour our skies ? Why are we not saved from these afflictions by that pledged Comforter Who was so safely sealed to us at Baptism ?

So quick, so bitter our complaint!

Yet St. Paul never doubted that the Comforter was his, even in that terrible hour when he wandered alone in the byways of Macedonia; driven out in impotence from Ephesus, his beloved home; trembling with a speechless dread over Corinth, that was on the edge of a revolt; and he homeless, sick, alone. The very sentence of death was on him. Without, were fightings; within, were fears. So he bore about in his body the dying of Jesus.

Or that bodily sickness of his—just think of it! How hard for him, with his fiery energy, with these young wayward, unsteady Churches all dependent on him, their one father—how hard to be simply beaten by physical weakness, by infirmities of the body! To lie sick; to be forced to bed; to be stricken with some misery that made him unpresentable, contemptible, just at a crisis when everything turned on his force and courage! How harsh, how pitiful a trial! Could not God, at least, spare His devoted servant from so dismal a failure as that? Why were not His angels at hand to bear him up, so that the sickness should not hurt him by night, nor the pestilence that walketh by noon-day? Yes, he, too, thought that. He be-

sought the Lord thrice to take away this stake on which his flesh was impaled. But no! A deeper, newer lesson was opened to him, beyond what the Psalmist had conceived. My grace is sufficient for thee. My strength is made perfect in this bodily weakness. So it was with him; we can read the whole story here. May it not be the same with us?

Or failure! We groan over failure—failure in the right, in good aims, in that which God must approve, on which our souls have been set. With prayers, perhaps, and beseechings of God, we have consecrated our intention. Yet it is allowed to fail; and to fail under the weight of wrong, of evil. The world is too strong for it. It goes under. The good, the innocent, fail. “Where is now their God?”

Well, it is bitter; but turn and watch the total and irredeemable failure of that passionate desire of St. Paul to face his own people at Jerusalem, and win them over by the warmth and candour and meekness of his appeal, as it is recorded in this downright book. Could anything be more touching? Always he is bent on this desire. He never lets it go. Always he protests, “I must get to Jerusalem!” Warnings crowd in upon him; prophecies from the

Spirit; every one implores him not to attempt it. And he knows all the peril. Yet nothing can hold him back from it. He must make the experiment, out of sheer love for his own home-folk. If only he may get there, and speak with them! He will do anything to conciliate them. He will conform to ancient customs. He will be diligent in the temple. He will be at charges for men under a vow. He will keep his Greek converts well out of the way. He will avoid all that could offend. He will labour to persuade, to reconcile. And even when the storm bursts, surely, if he can win a hearing, and can open his whole heart and tell them everything—how it all had come to him; how his very loyalty as a Jew had led him on to his present faith; how he had turned to Ananias, a devout, strict Jew, in the hour of his conversion; how it was while praying in that very temple at Jerusalem, where they had found him, that the vision had come which gave him his mission to the Gentiles;—surely they must believe him and understand him, and recognize his sincerity! His whole soul, that had nourished this purpose with his life-blood, went out in that appeal to his brethren whom he had in his

heart, for whose sake he would willingly be accursed, if it were lawful. And what is the result? What is his reward? Was ever a failure more dismal? They tore off their clothes. They threw dust into the air in their rage. They broke out into shrieks of hate. "Away with such a fellow from the earth: it is not fit that he should live!" And forty of them bound themselves with an oath, from that hour, that they would neither eat nor drink until they had killed Paul. The Spirit did not spare him that cruel repulse. It did not wipe out obstacles from his path. But within, it was there, with its strong succour, with its unfailing hope. So we read in my text, "The night following the Lord stood by him, and said, Be of good cheer, Paul: for as thou hast testified of Me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome." There it is—the inner purpose, the governing intention, of all St. Paul's career—the intention of reaching Rome, of preaching Christ in Rome. That intention, that purpose, still holds good. It is not defeated in St. Paul's defeat. Still the Spirit is bent on attaining it; still the present disaster will be turned to its profit. The failure, the imprisonment, the ferocity of his own people

against him, will be used to bear him on his way. If he cannot get to Rome freely, he shall reach it bound. But anyhow, bound or free, the Spirit will see to it that he arrives. Therefore, "be of good cheer, Paul!"

Beloved! look for God's control of your lives in just that fashion. If misfortunes, if failures, if losses, are bound by natural law, through the strength of evil, to fall upon you, then fall they will! But the power within, that accompanies you, that cares for you, will be there with you at each turn of the road, at each fresh moment of your course. There it will be, facing with you the new peril; resolute to make good its old intention for you, in spite of all that may assail; accepting the inevitable, but using it as material wherewith to secure your desire, your hope. There it will be—your faithful mate, working for you, scheming on your behalf, relaxing nothing, surrendering nothing; determined to carry you on towards your appointed goal—towards that good hope which God had set in your heart. There it will be—hindered, but never baffled; obstructed, but never beaten. "Be of good cheer!" it will always be crying, in visions of the night. "Be of good cheer! I am with you. We shall get home at last!

Things may look bad just now. Your last effort has gone to desperate grief. Your cherished plan has broken down. You are in a worse plight than ever. Everybody and everything seems to be against you for the moment. But be of good cheer! That which God wants you to do here on earth for Him, shall yet be done. Your life will have its proper fruit. The destined end shall be attained. By new means—by devious, difficult ways; bound, perhaps, in fetters, rather than in glad freedom as you had hoped. But God will see to it that you arrive. Be of good cheer!"

That is the law, and that the comfort which the story of the Acts bids you expect. And, believe me, no outer misfortune, no accident, can wreck your witness for Christ, if only you will turn and listen to that Inner Voice which is always near you—that Inner Power which is always furthering you on your way.

II.

THE LOSSES OF THE KINGDOM.

“Lord, wilt Thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?”—ACTS i. 6.

ONE reason, I think, why the Acts of the Apostles fails to lay hold of our personal interest, is because we miss in it a connected story. We do not feel the active pressure of a dominant plot. Figures appear and then disappear, we do not quite see why. We start with St. Peter and the assembly of the saints in the Upper Chamber. We are taken into the heart of their concerns. We watch the development of a regulated religious society, compact, fervent, complete. A fascinating experiment! Will it succeed? How will it fare as the glow of its first love begins to cool; as the problems presented by the lie of Ananias sharpen and multiply? We long to know all

this—to follow it up. But lo! it is dropped; it vanishes out of the tale. The Jerusalem Church only reappears incidentally. St. Peter is no longer the chief figure. He withdraws, we know not whither. And we who read are carried off into a totally new direction. The whole history concentrates itself on St. Paul and his varied fortunes. The book becomes a narrative of his personal adventures, his shipwreck, his perils, his escape. And then, after his successful arrival at Rome, the story comes to an abrupt close. It does not go back to review the ground, to gather up the threads it has dropped, to interpret or to sum up the body of events recorded. It simply ends; and ends, apparently, without any marked occasion or notable climax. It has got St. Paul to Rome; but all the more do we want to know what happened there; how he succeeded; how he won his freedom; how he returned to his travels; how his work broke away from under him again; his disappointments; his desertions; his loneliness. We guess from his Epistles how much there was that followed that first arrival of his. How was it that at his first answer no one stood with him? How was it that Demas forsook; that only Luke stood firm; that

every one sought his own, not the things of the Lord? How was it that he was finally killed there, amid the wreck of his long labours? Would that we could know! But nothing is told us. We are left standing, as it were; while the hero whom we have accompanied so long, with such absorbing attention, suddenly disappears from our ken—disappears in impenetrable silence. So the book seems desultory and incomplete, and our interest flags.

And yet, if we watch a little more carefully, we shall see that the book is held together from end to end by the pathos and the passion of a drama that is perfectly distinct, decisive, momentous. The plot is clear; the action is emphatic. The incidents, the personages, the varied scenes, all serve one historic purpose. They come to the front, or fall into the background, according to the needs of this supreme movement. Accidents of all kinds occur, yet all minister to the unravelling of the single idea which governs the arrangement of the material; governs it, not by deliberate artifice, but through the force of a Providence which shapes the end, rough-hew it as men will. There is a design and drama; and this drama is most tragic. It has in it, in spite of its unlaboured simplicity, some touch

of that high irony which seals, with the stamp of immortality, the stately shapeliness of Hellenic tragedies.

And the note of that solemn irony is struck at once, at the very opening of the story, by the words of my text: "Lord, wilt Thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?" Here is the start of the story. If we fasten on this, we shall see how it all hangs together; and why it ends where it does. Was ever any hope so pathetically reversed? "The kingdom restored to Israel?" That was the vision that lifted the souls of those wondering men, who found themselves walking once more the fields of Galilee, or the slopes of Olivet, with the Master Who had been dead, and was alive again. The old dream that ran in the blood of the Jew; the old dream for which he spilt that blood so often; the old dream that had flamed into fury in the wild heart of Simon the Zealot—that had strung the hot spirits of the Sons of Thunder with that outburst of heroic desire that they might sit on His right and on His left when He came in His kingdom; that old dream, which had been shattered into hopeless ruin by the curse of the Cross, and had gone down to the very dust of death as

the stone rolled over the tomb in the garden ; —that old dream had sprung up again from the grave ! It was astir in their hearts with a new force, with a splendid hope. It swung in upon them with all the vehemence of a reaction from so tremendous a despair. Surely the day had dawned ! Surely the hour had struck ! He was the Messiah after all, as they had always believed. The old words came rushing back upon their lips ; the old voices of the prophets were ringing round them ; all the Jew in them woke and leapt and sang. The cry of a King was in their midst. He was here, and the powers of Heaven were ranged about Him. The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob had raised Him up from the grave, in which David himself had been given over to the ignominy of corruption. The promise had been fulfilled. The last days were come. Now it will happen. It wants but a word, but a signal, and the Advent trumpets will blow. They look up into His face with eyes aflame. Their whole souls are surrendered to His Hand, to work for His cause, to share in His triumph. Oh that it might begin—begin with Him Who alone can bring it to pass ! He can ; and if He can, He surely will. For what has He been raised from

the dead, if not for this? "Lord, wilt Thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?"

Ah, poor child-hearts! gifted with a child's fervour; gifted with a child's touching ignorance of all that lies before them! Tenderly the Lord puts by the eager inquiry. He will not rudely tear the veil from their eyes—those eyes that shine with such innocent and guileless devotion. Slowly, by cautious experience, under the gradual discipline of time, the cruel truth shall disclose itself, as they shall be able to bear it. For the moment, let them not ask too closely how and when the good day will dawn. It is not for them to know the times and seasons which the Father keeps in His own hands. Enough for them to wait, and receive the mighty endowment of the Spirit, which will qualify them for their task. Enough for them to walk, step after step, along the pathway of the lengthening days, not asking to see any distant scene, not claiming a rapid result, leaving for the morrow the things of the morrow. Their present hopefulness, their buoyant confidence, is itself an inspiration. In the light of the vision which they held so dear, they will walk in safety, even though they know not yet the weariness of its delay. If

they were shown the worst, it would but confuse and dishearten them. Rather let them hope! Let them turn to address their own people in the glow of a confident expectation. Let them make their appeals without a shadow of coming woe to darken them. Let them haunt with clinging familiarity the courts of the temple. Let them be found, by day and by night, in the loved places on the hill of Zion. Let them mingle their voices with the ancient worship. Let them entwine all their aspirations with the memories of the older covenant. It is for the hope of the fathers, for the promises of David, that they stand there to witness. They burn to deliver their message of salvation to those to whom it was first sent; to the children of their forefather Abraham—their own brethren after the flesh. So let them start on their mission. That is how we watch them, in their early happy days, “abiding in Jerusalem,” when all was well—“continuing daily with one accord in the temple; breaking bread from house to house; eating their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God, and having favour with the people; while the Lord added daily to the Church those who were being saved.”

So the plot opens. But then begins the tragic surprise. The real outcome—what was it? Was it “the restoring again the kingdom to Israel”? Alas! the issue that indeed lay before them was the withdrawal of Israel from the kingdom. This is the drama of the Acts. It has only this to record—how Israel lost its privilege, its honour; how the kingdom passed wholly away out of the hands of the children of the covenant. It devotes itself to telling just those signal acts of the Apostles which brought about this melancholy consummation. All other acts of theirs are omitted but those which illustrate this vital purpose. This is why the Jerusalem Church drops out of the story; why we are told nothing more of its primitive social community; why St. Peter is at first so prominent, so significant, and then why he passes out of sight. For he had played his part in bringing about the momentous change at the famous interview with Cornelius; and then he retires. The historic interest of the scene transfers itself to St. Paul, the Apostle of the Gentiles. On him the whole drama is concentrated, because in his own person, in its perils, sorrows, imprisonments, stripes, shipwreck, rescue, he embodies the fortunes of this tremendous ques-

tion. In him, over him, it is fought out to the bitter end. He, though he be but a lonely prisoner, bound to a soldier by a chain, yet carries with him the name and the life of the Church of Christ. Cast out as he is by his own people, it is the Church that shakes the dust of Jerusalem off its feet, and takes ship with him from the sacred shores of Palestine. It is the Church that is thrown up, from the gulfs of stormy Adria, as a drifted waif upon the coasts of Italy. It is the Church that in him plants down its feet in the mistress-city of the vast Gentile world. Exiled from its older capital, it has passed across and found a new centre, where it will work in freedom, undisturbed. Now the plot is over; the drama is complete. The first act had opened in the very heart of Jerusalem, on the steps of the temple. The last scene closes with Paul in his own hired house at Rome, preaching the gospel, with no man to forbid him.

How vivid and intense is the contrast! The very simplicity of the narrative heightens the dramatic completeness. So tenderly, so pathetically, the writer lays in the lines of his first picture, as he tells of the fervent hopefulness of the Apostolic preaching; of the priests and

the Pharisees who crowd into the fold ; of the unbroken harmony, without a suspicion, without a flaw ; of the popular enthusiasm that magnifies the authority of the chiefs ; of the blessed moment of perfect peace, when all were of one heart and one mind, there in the very house of the dear Master, in the Upper Chamber, where His Presence still lingers, amid His own folk, to whom He had been sent—those lost sheep of the house of Israel. Most beautiful it is ! Most entrancing ! St. Luke dwells upon it with loving reiteration, as if he could not bear to tear himself away from it. “With great power gave the Apostles witness of the Resurrection of the Lord Jesus,” he repeats. “Great grace was upon them all. And believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women ; and they brought forth their sick into the streets, and laid them on beds and couches, that at the least the shadow of Peter passing by might overshadow some of them ; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith, and the Word of God increased ; and the number of disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly.” So it had been ; so wonderful, so thrilling, so overwhelming, so brimming with high promise

at the start! And then at the close, in the final chapter, we see the end of it all. It is the last and uttermost hour of Israel's opportunity. Even now, after all his endless disappointments, after his desperate collapse at Jerusalem, St. Paul cannot bring himself to resign every hope of appealing to his own nation. Yet once again he will see what a personal effort will achieve. Even now, at the eleventh hour, it might yet be given him to do something. At least he will leave no chance untried. Before he quite despairs, before he wholly surrenders himself to the Gentile mission, he calls the chiefs of the Jews together, and he explains to them the situation; he tells them frankly how, through the enmity of his nation, he has come a prisoner to Rome. He appoints a day when they may come to his lodging. There "he expounded and testified the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus, both out of Moses and the prophets, from morning until evening." So urgent is he, so enticing, so persistent! But it is no good. They could not agree. "They departed, and had great reasonings amongst themselves; after that Paul had spoken one word, Well spake the Holy Ghost by Esaias the prophet unto our

fathers, saying, Go unto this people, and say, Hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and not perceive: for the heart of this people is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes have they closed; lest they should see with their eyes, and understand with their heart, and be converted, and I should heal them." Yes! surely it was some terrible moral wrong within them which had built up this unyielding barrier against the good news of God. Some deep inward guilt could alone have sufficed to blind their eyes to the light of the salvation offered them, to block their ears against the shout of God. Some deadly sin has turned their hearts to stone. They have lost the power to see and know and believe. It is a judgment that has fallen upon them—a judgment which was the awful result of moral conditions which Isaiah had understood and detected long ago. Therefore the kingdom is taken from them, and given unto others. Therefore the natural branches of the old olive tree are cut off, that new may be grafted in. "They departed." The last word had been said. "Be it known therefore unto you, that the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles, and that they will hear it."

“They departed.” Those retreating backs of disputing Jews, as they disappear through the door, as the noise and murmur of their reasonings together dies away down the stairs, are the symbol of Israel’s pitiful rejection. Israel has turned its back on the covenant. It has withdrawn from its splendid privileges. It has lost the kingdom. Far on ahead there may be a day of conversion, of recovery. But now, out it goes! It can do God’s work no longer. It passes away out of the lines in which God’s manifestation to the world is to proceed. So long it had been the vessel of that sacred deposit, the instrument of the revelation! Through such heroic centuries it had been the arena of the Divine redemption. And now that story is closed; the twain have fallen out; the partnership is broken. God must turn elsewhere, must find other material. Down those stairs of the hired house they creep; out into the street they vanish. The door shuts behind them. They are seen no more. Christianity ceases to have its home in Jewry. Every year will see it dropping its Jewish interests, its Jewish habits. Before the century ends, the last scraps of Jewish Christianity are withering out, in obscure recesses of Syria. The whole

Church has become Gentile—Gentile in language, in customs, in atmosphere, in logic, in literature, in type, in colour, in movement. The great days of the Gentiles have come in. In unhindered freedom that mystery is disclosed, whereby, in the Body of Christ, the unity of the entire human race has been formed and sealed, wherein is no distinction of person or race. The temple of Jerusalem, on the sacred steps of which the primitive Church, in the loyalty of its confidence, had taken its stand, may shudder down now to its irrevocable doom. The enemies may encompass it about, and leave not one stone upon another. It had not understood the time of its visitation; and the tears of Christ had sealed its desolation. Down it must fall in hopeless ruin; but it will not now carry with it, in its wreck, the Church of God that once clung about its courts. For, free and secure, that Church has taken the round world itself for its rock of Zion, for its spiritual seat. It is out there, at large, at work, building the new house of God—eternal, not made with hands, that can never be cast down; the house which rose in Christ's Body from that grave in which the Jews had, with their own hands, buried their own honour and worship.

It is safe and free there, in the small hired house, where sits one lone prisoner, who, for all his chains, can still preach the Word without let or hindrance to all who will hear it.

“Lord, wilt Thou at this time?” The wistful, pathetic inquiry! Surely there is no one of any nobility, of any heart, who has not at one time or another looked up in His Master’s face and asked that question. The very capacity to ask it is a proof that we have found our way to believing in Him. It is because our belief in Him is genuine, is deep, that we really dare to think that the very best may really happen; that the day of the final victory might actually dawn. We of our day smile at such fantastic hopes, at such headlong haste, because our belief in God is so weak-kneed. We expect very little to happen. We look for no mighty change, no sweep of holy triumph. This year will not see it, nor next, nor this century. It hardly occurs to us to pray for its appearing. No! Yet we are nearer the mind of Christ’s Apostles at those rare hours when, perhaps in the first flush of a new-found faith, perhaps in some outbreak of recovered friendship with Jesus, we become aware that He Who was dead is

alive, and is at our side, and is speaking with us, that the blind walls of this earthly house of ours have yielded, and have given Him passage, and that we hold Him Who is King of kings and Lord of lords! Ah! then it is, as we suddenly become conscious that this world is in His hand as a very little thing, and that He was given to it to reconcile it to Himself, and to make it a garden of God, a vineyard of love, where all work would be a holy service rendered in a society that was knit by the Spirit into a pure and spotless city,—then it is that, caught up into the glory of this vision, rising to its invocation, and closing with its call, a new rush of belief floods over our souls, and bears them onward with a more splendid impulse; and we begin to hope for mighty doings, and catch glimpses of unutterable things, and prayers leap from our lips that we never before had dared to pray. Oh, Lord, is it not possible? Might it not be? Yea, Lord, even now, at once—in spite of all our ignorance, our weakness, our sin, in spite of all the weight and burden of ancient woes! Lord, Thou Who hast all power in heaven and earth, and holdest the keys of heaven and hell—Thou Who canst do all

things—wilt Thou not, of Thy great pity, bring in the new day, and restore again the kingdom to Thy Israel?

But that prayer, in the Apostles' mouth, was, you say, unfulfilled? It was the very reverse of what was really going to happen. Is that a prayer that men should put up to God—a vain, ignorant prayer, that must end in bitter disappointment? Quite true. And yet it was in the mind and mood of such a prayer that the Apostles were launched upon their historic task. And is it not only because they had the heart to pray it, that they were qualified to achieve what they did? That most amazing kingdom, which was not indeed restored to Israel, but opened now unto the Gentiles, was slowly established by the acts of those very men who looked for such great things. Their royal faith, which rose to the height of exaltation, might be mistaken in its anticipation of events; might misinterpret its coming experiences; might colour its dream with its own private cravings and hereditary habits; but it had not taken any wrong measure of the power of its King; it had not overshot at all the majesty of the transformation which He was going at that moment to work out

through them upon the earth. After all, the kingdom that was to be founded by them, as recorded in this book, is grander, is more amazing than any restoration, such as they pictured, of the old Israelite throne. This larger, deeper task taxed all their powers of hope, of faith. They did it so bravely, so firmly, just because they were made sensitive to God's guidance by the force and heat of their high expectations.

Beloved ! as life draws on, we look back, with sad hearts, at the visions that have fled, at the dreams that have come to nought—visions and dreams in eager youth, which stung the blood into quicker motion, and made us hope for the impossible. They have come to nought. The Lord has not restored the kingdom to Israel. But were they in vain, for all that? Do they serve only to embitter our cynicism ; to echo the old despairing cry of "Vanity! vanity!"? Nay! they did their work. They brought our souls up to the level where God can meet and use them. They rendered us pliable to His handling ; they laid us open to His direction ; they sealed us to His service. Because we dared to hope, to believe, to expect, therefore we became of His company. He

took us, led us, used us. And something has been done with us. Not what we thought; not according to our first desires. No! but something real—something that counts. If so, then bless His Name, give Him thanks, for the visions that came and went; yet, ere they passed, had freshened our start, had flushed the channels of our lives, had endowed us with the impulse which God has utilized in His own way. If we are the better even now for having dreamed our eager dreams in youth, then they were not in vain. We need never regret them. There is only one person who need bitterly repent of his past before God; the man or the woman who, in young hours when the opportunity was given, never hoped for an impossible day to arrive; never had the folly to surrender himself to a noble inspiration.

Yes! high hopes in youth are the stock-in-trade with which we are meant to open the business of life. That business gets rid of much of its early stock, and transfers it all. But, without the hopes, without the belief, there would have been no business done at all. The confidence that God will do wonders, beyond our ken, is the inspiration under which

we move out to fulfil our part. What that part shall actually prove to be, we learn only bit by bit, line upon line, step after step. Not for us to measure the times and seasons which the Father has in His own hands.

And, for that slow learning, there is but one rule, but one method—the rule, the method, of the gospel for to-day, which bids us care not for the morrow, but live for to-day. Sufficient for each day is the kindly light nigh at our feet, which shows us just the one step, and no more, which can be taken now. One step! No distant scene! That is all the Apostles saw. We watch them through the Acts, taking each step as it comes, leaving to to-morrow the things of to-morrow. Sufficient for the day is its own evil. They anticipate no evils before they arrive. Only at each juncture they see the immediate light; they move where it will let them. So they were content to walk. So may we be content to walk with them, nourishing, indeed, in the spirit an immense hope, a vision of glory; yet not, for that, ashamed to take each humble step that lies just in front of us along the path of God's will. There is our Christian walk; there is its splendour and its severity, its exultation

and its obedience. So walking, we may pass o'er moor and fen, o'er crag and torrent, unhurt and undismayed ; grateful, at once, for the faith that allowed us to see visions afar off, and also for the humble lamp of the Spirit, that keeps at least one spot of light at hand to cheer us, amid the surrounding night. So walking, God grant that in the morn, when the angel-faces smile once more, we, looking back, may be enabled to see that though, indeed, the kingdom has not been given back to Israel, yet we have helped to open out, and to establish, a kingdom of God on earth, which shall never pass away !

Oh, trust that light, however narrow ! Trust it, however black the darkness without ! Black, indeed, it may be, sweeping down upon us in England to-day—to-day as we peer ahead, while the poor already quake before the incoming winter ; while the stealthy shadow of the cholera sweeps nearer and nearer ; while, for the first time within our memories, an Englishman lies dead under the bullets of English soldiers !¹ Oh ! black enough without and within. Yet wherever there is light for to-day, for the moment, trust it, walk in it.

¹ September, 1893.

Dream of to-morrow if you like, but walk by to-day. Let to-morrow take care for the things of itself. Walk by the kindly light that never quite fails any one of us, if only we will faithfully follow it.

III.

THE PEACE OF THE KINGDOM.

“And all that believed were together, and had all things common ; and sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need. And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart.”—ACTS ii. 44-46.

“ONE heart and one soul !” Yes, we will remember it once again ; we who stand so far off that beautiful hour of gladness ; we who know such a different tale ; who recognize but too well what the dark bad years have brought us ; we, wearied with long sickness, sundered from each other by deep fissures, cloven by the judgment of God’s wrath ; we who stand gazing at one another over dividing gulfs—gazing at those whom we cannot reconcile, with whom we shall never go up to the house of God, never go up with the tribes of the Lord, with those that keep holyday. Nay ! for Judah is

cruel to Ephraim, and Ephraim to Judah. Still, even now, in our distress, we will dare to lift up our heads, and look back, and remember that it was not always as it is with us. We will recall to mind that once, long ago, in days cut off from us by centuries of blunder and sin—just once, at least, before the flood broke in, before the first lie, before the first quarrel—Christians knew “how goodly and pleasant a thing it is for brethren to dwell together in unity.”

“One heart!” There were then no sore affections, that pined in solitude or contempt. No wounded lives, that crept out of sight because no man regarded. No blood that dripped from secret gashes. No blind and cruel collisions. No secret venom that poisoned. No bitter frictions that wasted. No! But the whole Body was moved as by “a single heart”—a heart that danced within them in its exultation; one pulse of happiness, that beat in unhindered rhythm; one fount of brightness, and of confidence, and of joy, and of peace; one seat of warmth, and glow, and delight. And, with this one heart, there was also one soul. One soul! No stunted spiritual loneliness. No forlorn prayers. No praises nipped and

curtailed. No experiences smothered. No emotions choked. No spirits made pinched and mean by isolation and selfishness. No blundering experiences of solitary souls—fantastic, grotesque, sterile. But one soul, quickening the whole—one soul, issuing in a single act, a single worship, a single song, a single throb, a single motion, that shook the whole house; with voices mingled, with lives fused as by a living flame; soul answering to soul, as star to star; possessed by one Spirit—the very bond of peace.

So they lived. With one heart and one soul; and therefore holding all things in common. There was not one that lacked. No, not one! Think of it. Not one that had dropped out, unregarded and forgotten; not one of all that little company that knew the miseries of uncertainty; not one given over to the insecurity of demoralizing chance; not one sick, and starved, and homeless, and unclothed; no one broken waif and forlorn stray. No, not one! Not one that lacked.

So it came—the perfect hour of happy peace; the hour that was to pass so quickly. Pass it must! Even as the songs that broke out of

heaven round the Saviour's birth were bound to pass away—those glad angel-voices that told of “glory to God in the highest,” and of peace and good will to men, yet were so soon to retreat back into the silence, reappearing not in glad greetings to wondering shepherds, but only in black hours, to minister to a lonely Sufferer, amid the blind stones of the wilderness, alone with the wild beasts, and weary with long hunger; or, again, to wipe the blood-sweat from His brow, at that awful hour when the bitter cup from which He drank was set to His lips. So it was that those angels of the Birth-song re-emerged out of their heaven. And as with the Master, so with the servants. Not in the swift gladness of an easy victory, but in the long agony of a penitential sacrifice, will the Church of the Crucified accomplish her mission.

And this Book of the Acts is the story of how the gradual disclosure of her mission did, as a fact, break up this her early peace. That is the deep comfort of this book. Just imagine our dismay if we had been left with no record in Scripture of anything but of this delightful moment of realized bliss in Jerusalem; and could only bitterly contrast with this primitive

glory our own shameful disunion, our own splintering controversies! But, thank God! we are spared so heart-breaking a trial. The Acts shows us how the break happened; how sin entered; how pains and perplexities arose, even within the range of the Apostles themselves.

And more than this. It shows us that this perfect peace was only possible at a moment when the Church had not yet entered upon the strain and effort of her real work in the world. It exhibits to us the limitations under which it was attained—limitations which the forward movement of her mission was bound to overstep. Miserable as it was to leave behind so halcyon a calm, so benign a gladness, yet it was not a mere process of deterioration, of decay, which brought it all to a dismal close. It was not that the Church simply dropped from her high estate, from her ideal purity, from her perfected condition, and sank to a lower level. No, not that! That is not the story as it stands in the Acts. It does not tell us of a decline in the Jerusalem Church from love to selfishness, from socialistic harmony to the evils of private property, from orderly peace to disorderly quarrelling. Rather, it shows how this idyllic situation was limited to the Church

at Jerusalem; and that the disturbances, the jars, the troubles, the perplexities, which followed so quickly, belong to the Church's advance towards her vaster labours, towards her higher glory. She got into the rougher waters because she had launched her bark on larger seas. She might have failures now to record, and dangers to encounter; but, for all that, she was gaining more than she lost. It was the road of victory that took her to the war. This is what the Book of the Acts so vividly portrays. And, in so doing, though, of course, it does not justify the quarrels and the losses and the wrongs which were due to human weakness and sin, it does justify the course which compelled the Church to go out beyond the bounds of those pleasant temple courts. It does justify her refusal to enclose herself within her earliest borders, even though that refusal cost her the loss of that unrecovered hour when "all were of one heart and one mind, and had all things in common."

This is what we are to see and apprehend, so that our regrets over our losses may not be sterile wails over a vanished dream, but rather as the stern sorrows of resolute warriors, who, however bitter their tears over comrades slain

and homes now desolate, still, for all that, press ever forward on the road decreed, towards the hope set before them, whither He leads, Who goes forth, conquering and to conquer.

Let us try to see how and why Jewish belief in Jesus Christ should have realized itself in this form, while the Gentile Churches took so different a development. For that hour of unstained peace, when no man had need, was, we see, limited to the Church of Jewish believers ; while the great drama of the Acts turns on the extension of the faith to the Gentiles.

Christ, as Lord, has a double aspect in His single historic Person. By the same act—the act of His death—He closes one period and opens another. He ends the old ; He begins the new. Both aspects are real. And we cannot be surprised, therefore, if, to the Jewish believer, it was the first by which Christ appealed to him. The Messiah was come ; and, with Him, the End. That was the primary thought which possessed him. The old dispensation had, at last, disclosed its final solution. Step by step, it had moved towards this climax. Through the long centuries the Jew had undergone his peculiar discipline. He had worked out his task. He had verified, in

his typical existence, the spiritual journey which all men must traverse in their approach to God—the journey through the Law to the Gospel. The outlines of a religious career had been permanently discovered and fixed. Nothing will ever change that. And now the fulfilment of it all is here. The whole is gathered up, summed, consummated. On this line, by this road, there is nothing more to be said or done. No better thing can happen from God's side than the gift of His own Son; no fresh and higher word be spoken than the Word of God Himself. "God, Who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by His Son." "In these last days." That is the dominant note that rings in every speech of the Apostles in Jerusalem. They are those upon whom "the ends of the world are come." History concludes with this act of God. It is final. It is absolute. All is over and done. The Apostles stand on the edge of time; on its uttermost brink. There is nothing now to wait for but the return of the Messias. And "then cometh the end."

All their language is full of this; all their exultation culminates in this. And we, my

brethren, have spoken together before now, in this church, of the truth which justified their assertions and their triumphs. They were not mistaken. Christ is the Close and Climax of history. Christ is the uttermost Word that God will speak. We always must claim absolute-ness, finality, for the revelation that comes through Him Who is the perfect Image of God Himself. Quite true! And, in the passion of this recognized truth, the Jewish believers gave themselves over to realize the end. They drew together a Church of the elect, saved out of the untoward generation about them; a Church of the good—of the saints—out of which all evil was expelled.

Now, such a body, compact, unified, purged, exclusive, could pitch life at a very high spiritual level. It could spend itself wholly in unceasing prayer and praises. It could count on an heroic and universal power of self-sacrifice. It could make magnificent moral demands. It could assume that selfishness, and worldliness, and falsity, and self-deceit had become negligible quantities. Possessed as it was by one heart and with one soul, it could well afford to have one purse. It will have "all things in common;" it will lay everything

at the Apostles' feet. For what, indeed, had it to do with industrial or social interests? It is the end of all things in the contemplation of which it is absorbed. Human society, human history, human industries, have ceased to possess significance, or to exercise attraction. In unstinted charity, they will all help one another. No one shall lack. A single family, a united household, they will all be surrendered to the beauty and the peace of concentrated beneficence. Daily in the temple; breaking bread from house to house; assembling in love-feasts, giving alms to the poor; eating their bread in gladness and singleness of heart;—so they will wait and watch and pray, until the heavens open, and He comes with clouds, and the restitution of all things is begun.

But, my brethren, there is another side altogether to all this. That very Cross which closed the Law, opened out for the Christ a way to a whole new world—the world outside the Jewish covenant; the world of the “Gentiles.” And that world is only at the beginning of its religious experiences. It has never yet been brought, like the Jew, under a connected and continuous spiritual development. It has not been gathered up into a massive and growing

movement under the direct impulse of the Spirit of God. All its work, all its journey, lies yet ahead. Its preparation hitherto has been obscure, underground, partial ; just qualifying it for undertaking this novel journey, but not carrying it anywhere along the road. For it "all things are to be made new." It has got to begin at the very beginning. It has got to assimilate the spiritual experiences won for it by what the Jew has so marvellously achieved. And, under those same experiences, which form the cardinal convictions of all religion, it has got to bring a thousand thousand secular gifts and secular forces, of which the Jew had hardly dreamed. Whole new worlds of art, of literature, of philosophy, above all, of imperial organization, of citizenship, of social and industrial progress, lie there, waiting for their reconciliation with God, waiting for their consummation in Christ. This world is but at the start. It has an infinite possibility of growth yet open to it, with new nations to rise and fall, and rise again. And over all, and with all, Christ's Name to be carried, Christ's redemption, Christ's peace ; sealing to it the Fatherhood of that God Who has made of one blood all nations over the face of the whole

earth, that all may realize this common brotherhood in His Body, in His Flesh, Who died for all, that all might rise in Him.

Ah! a vast, a glorious, an amazing work, this! But, alas! not to be done in a day! Christ is, no doubt, for it also, the End; but how far, far off that End must yet be, before it be realized over this enormous surface, within this endless variety of life, along all the rich and fertile outgrowths which may yet be developed! It was a task that had yet to begin. As St. Paul's fervid eyes gazed out over the multitudinous earth, which His Master through His ministry claimed for Himself, it seemed to him as if it was all enveloped in gross, unbroken darkness. The day had yet to dawn—the first ray of light to shoot up in the horizon. Nothing had begun; everything had to be done. How long—how long would it be before that day of the Gentiles began to sink down towards its last eventide? Who dared say? Who could do more than remember that a thousand years were in God's sight as one day? And it is God's scale by which this day of the Gentiles will be measured, for Whom a thousand years may pass as in a moment, as in the twinkling of an eye.

Leave with Him the question when the end shall indeed be. For the moment, the one task, urgent, fiery, masterful, is how to begin. Begin! Begin! That is the urgent call that cries in the ears of the Apostle. Find some entry, however minute. Press through every door, however thick the adversaries. Touch this huge mass somewhere, somehow. Get hold of one, or of two. Try all the gates. Make a start. Feel your way. By hook or by crook, through perils, and nakedness, and scourging, and death, get your foot within the frontiers; find some passage for your Lord. Get the leaven working in the lump. Insert it; lodge it; let it stir. Anyhow, begin. We will see what comes of it, if only a start can be made. Begin! Begin! So the flame burned in the heart of St. Paul—the flame of that “woe” that was on him if he preached not the gospel.

There was the contrast. The Jew stood absorbed in his temple, in the amazement of having reached the end; the end of the Law; the end of all his inner struggles, miseries, doubts, loathings; the end of all the cries of the Psalms; the end of all the agonies of the Prophets. But the Apostle of the Gentiles is tossed to and fro over the earth, in the heat of

his spirit, by the wonder of the open mystery. It is the beginning. A new world has begun. A new day has broken. A new work is forward. A new hope has dawned. A new covenant is sealed. A new life has sprung into being. A new age is before us. A new battle is to be fought, and a new victory to be won. Behold! all things are to become new.

So intense is the contrast, between Christ the End of the Law, and Christ the Firstborn from the dead! And we can see the direct practical differences that followed from this contrasted outlook.

This Gentile Church could not be an assembly of perfected saints, of the elect, gathered out of an untoward generation into a realized unity of heart and life, set apart from active life, a spiritual community, daily in the temple praising God, eating their bread in gladness and singleness of heart, having all things common, waiting for their Lord to reappear.

Nay! in St. Paul's view, the Church has got to fling itself down into the throng of sinners; into the hubbub and madness of the marketplace; into the heart of those dreadful, heated, proud, devilish Gentile cities. It has got to plunge in, to lay hold, to wrestle, to war. It

will seize on men and women crazy with passions and lusts ; it will have runaway slaves to purge and redeem ; it will have to battle for their souls, to fight with them against themselves, to be at the risk of hideous moral reactions and disastrous falls. Its converts will have all the unsteadiness, the headiness, the excitement of novices. They will break out of their own control. They will have their heads turned. They will lapse, and sin, and despair, and yet turn again. All the discipline of the religious life has got to begin for them. This will be his Gentile Church, over whom his soul will go out in yearnings, warnings, beseechings, threatenings ; in fear, in pain, in agony ; in cries as of a woman in travail ; in passionate prayers which drain his very blood ; straining, striving, struggling, loaded with anxieties, crushed by disappointments, wounded by betrayals ; dying, as he said, daily ; making himself all things to all men, if by any means he may save some. So he passes on to his mighty mission. No blessed peace, indeed, for him ; no delightful eating of his bread in gladness of heart. No ! but wars, and tumults, and dissensions, and wraths. Everywhere prisons and bonds.

Yes ! not peace, but a sword. And yet it is with him, let us remember, that the real movement of Christianity is made. It is in him setting itself to the actual task laid upon it—a task that could not be achieved in the peace of Jerusalem, but yet was the line of advance, was the road of victory. A victory, not a decline. That is the story of the Acts. It is in leaving Jerusalem, and going out into the struggling world, that the Church witnesses to its call to win human Society for Christ. For it was not in reality a new social experiment that they were bent on developing in that Jerusalem Church. Rather, for these Jews, the day of social interests, industrial experiments, secular organizations, was suspended, was closing. They were a religious community gathered out of the wicked world, for whom secular affairs had ceased to be a practical concern, for whom spiritual motives dominated the scene from horizon to horizon. As such, they cannot much help us to understand what form a Christian society should take. If we want to know how the new faith in Christ should apply itself to secular concerns, how it should act upon industrial society, we should turn, not to Jerusalem and the Jews, but to

those Gentile cities — Corinth, Thessalonica, Ephesus, Philippi—where St. Paul, in face of the majesty of the grandest secular organization that the world had yet seen, the imperial government of Rome, is passionately bent on building up the character of the Christian citizen, who, because he has a free citizenship on high with Christ in that Jerusalem which is above, is therefore bound to put that citizenship to proof in sight of his fellow-men, in harmony with the laws of honesty, and righteousness, and humanity, and liberty, and brotherhood. There it is that he is laying down the principles by which Christianity sets itself to fashion a new society. There it is that he is commanding that, if any do not work, neither shall they eat; that with quietness they work, eating their own bread. There it is that we can watch him handling all the secular relationships, bringing them all under the light of Christ—fathers and children, and husbands and wives, and masters and servants, and rich and poor. There it is that we can see him grappling with all sorts and conditions of men, sure that for all Christ has an answer. Only it will be a long, tedious, painful process, if ever this huge lump of industrialism is to be

leavened. The end cannot be rushed, when this mixed mass is the material in which it is to be realized. At Jerusalem, in their high exultation, an Ananias, a Sapphira, is fatal. They can only be cast out dead. But St. Paul's Churches are full of such folk; people who will yield and break into hypocrisies and lies, if you demand too much of them at once. He has got to create a conscience in them; to inspire the convictions of honesty, of equity, of generosity, of self-sacrifice. He has got to retain them in spite of falls, that they may slowly purge themselves unto good works. Such terrible reactions there will be; but then, also, such vehemence of self-reproach, such indignation, such fear, such zeal, such revenge, such carefulness, such clearing of themselves! That is the story that will repeat itself over and over, as the vast toil proceeds, by which the faith laboriously transfigures the secular processes that constitute human society. Not at Jerusalem is this attempted, with all its peaceful beneficence; but in the tumultuous storm of Gentile life. Not by the piety of St. James, but by the warfare of St. Paul.

Yet Jerusalem has its enduring message—
the message asserted, uplifted, by all religious

sacrifices of this world's goods. It secures the principle of the subordination of all property to spiritual motives. It announces that private property has not the last word ; that it occupies no final position ; that it falls into a secondary place. There is a ground beyond and behind it where we can take our stand, and from which we can freely pass judgment upon it. There are moral claims, there are religious sanctions, to which it must always yield ; in the light of which it is in itself but a very little thing. Every heroic effort, like that of the Jerusalem Church, stamps upon the world's story, upon man's imagination, this life-giving conviction. And, therefore, such an effort never loses its force. Always it is there to assert that it is more blessed to give than to receive ; that those who are saints cling least to their private rights, and hold all their goods at the disposal of the brotherhood ; that the poor are worth as much as the rich ; that the battle of God is not to the strong ; that He cares for the weak and the suffering, rather than for those who have all that they desire, and need no physician ; that worldly prosperity and success have nothing to do with that spiritual judgment, according to which souls are accounted worthy in the sight of God at the last day.

My brethren, that is the austere voice that speaks out of that Jerusalem peace. Has it nothing to say to us to-day? Has it dropped into the silence of a vain regret? Was it found to be a mistake? Has it passed away with that perished Church of Jewish believers?

Nay, what voice should be louder lifted in our sad times? What message is more sorely needed? Surely the Church of Christ needs still that living witness of religious communities, which can reassert this ancient verity; can stand over against our toil for wealth, our commercial fever, our industrial preoccupations, and declare by their vivid surrender of all that we hold so dear, the supremacy—the sole and imperative supremacy—over all economic and social life, of spiritual interests, of spiritual aims. If such communities do not directly assist us to solve social problems, yet at least they uphold the noble principles by which alone all social problems can be solved. They tell us plainly that we shall never find our way to industrial peace unless we bring into play those moral motives, those religious impulses, which lie behind the rights and interests of property and the naked mechanism of competition, and which spring from that

common brotherhood which makes all men one in Christ Jesus.

That voice of Jerusalem! It speaks home, not only to our social, but to our private conscience. It bids us, at all costs, in face of all our dusty labours, our fret and trouble and worldly noise, secure to ourselves, within the recesses of the spirit, an inner chamber, clean-swept and pure; a safe retreat on the steps of the temple; some white spot in our lives, whence all greed and tumult are expelled—every Ananias, every Sapphira, every hypocrisy, every lie, are cast out dead; some white spot, where our salvation is made good, is actually assured, and our soul is in realized union with Jesus, and we have no sinful interest, and no interrupting struggles, but, in singleness of heart, we eat at God's Table, and God is all in all.

Ah! some such refuge—such vantage-ground; where the battle has been already won; where Christ is in possession; where the Spirit fills the House—if only we could secure that! It is that which we seek on Sundays, and in Sacraments. We would wrench ourselves away from secular passions. Strive to make sure that, at least, a start has been made, in some small corner of your

being, where you actually taste already the joy of the uttermost fulfilment—the peace of heaven! It will be no idle thing. Out from thence will go the heat and the glow by which you will slowly bend to God's service the less tractable material. According to the measure with which you have attained purity of purpose at any one spot in life, will be the precision and accuracy with which you will apply the mind of Christ to the troubled work of daily doings.

Fights, and stripes, and agony in the wrestle with sin in the other departments of your being,—you will not fear these, if only there be somewhere a blessed home of the saints, into which you may retreat; if only, at certain rare and beautiful moments, you do know what it is to be at peace with God, in singleness of heart, in purity of soul, with all personal ambitions slain, and with all your life surrendered to the peace that passeth understanding.

IV.

THE WINNING OF THE KINGDOM.

“Do therefore this that we say to thee : We have four men which have a vow on them ; them take, and purify thyself with them, and be at charges with them, that they may shave their heads : and all may know that those things, whereof they were informed concerning thee, are nothing ; but that thou thyself also walkest orderly, and keepest the law. As touching the Gentiles which believe, we have written and concluded that they observe no such thing, save only that they keep themselves from things offered to idols, and from blood, and from strangled, and from fornication.”—ACTS xxi. 23-25.

HOW strange and dry and formal the details sound ! How totally without significance ! Yet it is the very heart of the crisis at which we stand. The drama of the Acts is just touching its tragic, its culminating hour.

It is the moment when, in spite of beseechings and tears that all but broke his heart, St. Paul has flung himself into the peril. Jerusalem is astir from end to end. The chiefs of the Church

cannot answer for peace, unless he walk with the utmost caution and reserve. The fury is on the edge of an outbreak ; the slightest cause would set it loose beyond their control. What the storm of passion is which they are struggling to hold in, we can gauge from the tumult that is so swiftly to shatter all hopes of reconciliation. That maddened crowd, tearing its clothes, throwing dust into the air, clutching at St. Paul until the Roman soldiers have to close round him and carry him along in their arms, with their vicious scream, " Away with such a fellow from the earth : it is not fit that he should live ! "—these are the forces that he is to face.

And, at such a moment of heat, of frenzy, how queer it sounds to hear of the device by which, as the Apostles trust, all may yet go well ! How is it that they can expect to keep under all this tempest by St. Paul being at charges for four men, that they may shave their heads ? And what is the value of this policy by which the crisis is to be met—the policy of commanding the Gentiles to abstain from eating the flesh of an animal that has been strangled, and from buying any meat in the market with the blood still in it ?

All through the Acts this is our puzzle. The

actual conflict always turns on this question of meats. The words quoted in my text carry us back, as we know, to the Council of Jerusalem—that earliest gathering of the united Church, summoned round its mother-hearth, to deal with the first serious crisis that has shaken the whole Church to its foundations. That council, by the united efforts of all the leading and most authoritative Apostles, succeeded in staving off the terrible split of Jew from Gentile, which has become so imminent now that St. Paul has challenged the issue afresh. And it was staved off, by the adoption of this peculiar rule about butchers' meat, which bade the Gentiles abstain from strangled flesh, as from fornication and idols.

And, again, at that most solemn scene, in which St. Peter is taught the full gospel of the mystery of the Gentiles, on the roof, in the trance, at the tanner's house in Joppa, it is not, to our surprise, some vast apocalyptic vision which discloses to him the world-wide supremacy of Him Who is to be King of kings and Lord of lords. Nay, it is "a sheet let down by the four corners, and in it all manner of meats, clean and unclean;" and the voice that so startles him is one that calls to him, a Jew,

and bids him rise and kill and eat certain kinds of flesh that had been hitherto forbidden him.

It is always over this problem of meats and drinks that the perilous and critical moments occur. In the matter of Cornelius, the Jerusalem Christians are not troubled at St. Peter baptizing Gentiles, but at his going in and eating with them. And if we turn to the Galatians, to expound the Acts, we find once more that the burning hour at Antioch, when St. Paul, in his indignation, found himself carried to the point of rebuking St. Peter to the face, was hot with the same quarrel. It was an affair of meals. At the arrival of the extreme men from James, Peter had shrunk from eating food with the Gentiles, as he had been doing up till then. The heart and heat of the battle raged throughout round these minute social formalities.

Why was this ?

Now, before touching on the matter directly before us, let us notice how it illustrates the innate truthfulness of the Acts. This plain narrative of facts tallies absolutely with all our human history, our human experience. That is just the way things always do happen. Always great historic quarrels take place over what seem to be trivial points. The antagonistic

forces pile up their fires underground over an immense area ; until, at last, an outbreak is inevitable. And yet, in order for the outbreak to occur, there must be some practical act, some direct, outward, visible incident, in and about the doing or not doing of which the entire issue is challenged. It may be small or big ; that hardly matters. In itself it is, in general, of no peculiar importance. But the great movement of things has, somehow, brought it out to the front, as the symbolic expression of the question at stake ; and every one who is at all concerned, agrees to do battle just there, just over that, and not somewhere else. It is only outsiders, ignorant of the main matter, who hold up their hands in futile amazement, and pronounce it ridiculous to quarrel over so minute and insignificant a detail. Of course it is ; but no one is quarrelling over the insignificant detail. If that detail were the only thing in dispute, the quarrel would never take place. But it is only stupidity which can see nothing but the detail, and remains blind to all the principles and passions that are clashing, in inevitable antagonism, at the point where that detail happens to occur.

Run over an instance or two. If you had

dropped down upon northern England twelve hundred years ago, you would have found the entire land, whether lay or clerical, immersed in a long and bitter controversy. If you had inquired what it was about, you would have been told, not a lock-out in the coal trade, but the shape of the priest's tonsure, and the day on which Easter should be kept. Now, how stupid it would have been of you to say, "Oh, why quarrel about such trivial minutiae!" instead of going behind conduct so incomprehensible, and setting to work to discover what was the real secret of the passions that broke out over things so slight. Then you would have discovered that the battle was real and deep indeed; for, over those details, a war was being fought between the ascendancy of foreign Rome and the authority of national and native traditions.

Or, if you had reappeared in England five hundred years later, and found archbishops in exile, and sees stripped, and kings furious, and if you had asked for the cause of all this terrible scene, and if you had been told, "It is all because of a ring or a staff which the archbishop refuses to receive from the king," would you have cried, "How silly to fight about a mere ring!" instead of recognizing that the real issue

was whether the Church should be absorbed in the feudal system or retain its freedom?

Or, if, again, you dropped in five hundred years later, and saw the Midlands full of trained bands drilling, and the curse of civil war flaming out over fair fields of England, and had asked the reason, and been told, "It is because Mr. Hampden has refused to pay ship-money," would you have begun to scold, and to say, "Why kill each other over a few shillings?" If you had, you would only have shown your profound ignorance of the realities of the situation.

And, believe me, it is a like ignorance which enables people, in our own day, to go about wondering why religious people are so foolish as to get excited about the mere lighting of a candle, or the posture of a priest.

The writer of the Acts understands far better the normal experience of history. He knows that two opposing theories may collide indefinitely without provoking an explosion, until they are brought to book, as it were, by some positive bit of actual practice. It is when the electrical currents are touched, are traversed by some practical shock, that the explosive violence of the energies at work is revealed.

So it always has been ; so it was with this

terrible rupture in the early Church, to which we will now return. And the particular practical details over which the collision concentrated itself were, in this case, peculiarly liable to kindle passion.

For, first, they were matters of social habit, affecting the private, intimate, domestic life at every turn. Meats and drinks, we call them lightly. But it was just because they were matters of the table, of the household, of the hearth, of the home, that they came so close to the heart and to the life of the Jewish people. It was no battle of the schools ; no controversy of angry theologians. It was something which threw every house, every family, into confusion ; there was no one who was not touched ; and touched, moreover, in those clinging habits which have grown with the daily and hereditary growth—habits which drive their roots down into the elemental soil of the being, and are interwoven with all the primal instincts and memories and affections. Many a nation has burned with hate against a foreign tyranny, not because it was unjust, or severe, or bad, but simply because it ignored and despised and overrode those social habits which were the native characteristics of its lost freedom.

And, remember, in the case of the Jew, this clinging to peculiar social customs, this distinction of clean and unclean flesh, this method of killing his meat, had gained a unique emphasis from the situation in which he stood. Thrown down as he was in loose exile from his country, amid hordes of mingled nations, without king or country, these customs of his constituted for him his nationality, his separate existence. They preserved the type. They built up a frontier for him against the flood of unstable peoples. They gave to the homeless a sense of home; to the outcast, a refuge where he enjoyed the intimacies of his father's house. Without them, he would have no foothold in this weltering sea in which all national distinctions were swallowed up. He was touched in the very heart of his national life, then, when these customs of his, in meats and drink, were threatened.

And, moreover, as he compared his own domestic habits with the Gentile customs around him, he felt them to be justified. What a clean, sweet, orderly domestic life he had secured, in contrast with the loose recklessness, the indiscriminate licence, so typical of the Gentiles! These careless feasts of theirs,

without rule or principle, round idol-temples, had that about them which made it obviously natural to class them in the same category as fornication. The Jew, looking out at those wild orgies from his safe and beloved home, knew well what he had gained by his strictness in clean and unclean meats, and by all the careful conscience instructed in the Law. He was only too tempted to thank God that he was not as those Gentile publicans ; only too tempted to recognize himself as a grown man among babes ; as a guide to those who were blind ; as a member of the only people in all the earth who understood how a pure and bright life could be lived.

And, lastly, and more than all, these habits of his not only carried with them all the passion of his national patriotism, but also they were charged with religious sanction, with the authority of God Himself. The Jew had been taught through these the wonderful truth that the whole scheme of his life, from end to end, high and low, in every detail however tiny, at every moment however fleeting, was under God's eye, within God's notice, subject to God's ruling. The Law of his God followed him into every recess ; directed every motion ; stamped itself on his dress, on his food. At every point

it met him, marking him out as God's servant, God's man; recalling to him his sacred privilege; endowing him, in his daily individual doings, in his going out, in his coming in, with the dignity of one whose slightest actions were worthy of Divine control and approval. And all this now concentrated itself specially on his meals. For not only were family meals an expression of worship, but so much of his legal and ritual and social law had become an impossibility in his scattered exile among Gentiles, that it was only within the sanctuary of the home, at the household table, that he could still preserve his ancient use, and assert his national identity.

And it was these habits of his, these historic practices, authorized by God Himself, hallowed by immemorial tradition, justified by actual experience, essential to the preservation of his nationality, ingrained into the texture of his life—it was these which were to be thrown lightly aside by this renegade Jew, false to his forefathers, false to his law, false to his vow, who was reported to be going up and down the world, upsetting the customs which Moses commanded! “Away with such a fellow from the earth: it is not fit that he should live!”

So the Jew would instinctively speak. And, my brethren, was it an easy thing for the Jewish Christian not to join in the cry? Had he, then, ceased to be a Jew in becoming a Christian? Those customs were national, were part and parcel of his innermost patriotism; his popular instincts, his noblest traditions, all went with them. Was he not on his mettle to prove that he was not false to his law or to his own people, by believing in Christ? What was he doing there, on the steps of the temple, but asserting, with might and main, that he believed "in Him of Whom Moses and all the Prophets had written"? He is a Jew still, though he be a Christian. No one is more fervent than St. Paul in saying so. "It is for the faith of my fathers that I stand here to-day;" "I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee;" "I believe all things that are written in the Law and in the Prophets;" "I stand here and am judged for the hope of the promise made of God unto our fathers: unto which promise our twelve tribes, constantly serving God day and night, hope to come." A Christian was the true Jew, the only Jew. Christ had not destroyed, but fulfilled. No charge could more sting a Jewish Christian, none could be more damaging or more disastrous,

than the charge that he was breaking down the authority of Moses and the Law, or that he himself was false to his own race. Can we be surprised at the excitement, at the confusion, at the uproar?

Indeed, the problem was horribly difficult. Let us see how sharp it would prove, as step by step its perplexities disclosed themselves; and how and why it was that the Apostles at Jerusalem, and Peter himself, would not be sure how far they had to go, or what they might concede. For it is not the simple question of converting Gentiles to the faith which is the difficulty. Every Jew would expect that. Every prophecy of the Messiah had foretold the incoming of the Gentiles. So far it was all plain sailing. But what was to be the position of these Gentiles after they had been admitted? What was to be the form and fashion of their life? They are members of a body which has a distinct type of living set for it by God Himself in His Law. If they come in, they must naturally adopt its deep-seated and authoritative habits. For, most certainly, the Jew cannot abandon his and adopt theirs. His own are clean and healthy and pure; theirs are reckless and base and disgusting. No Jew

who had any loyalty, or any conscience, would think of leaving off what was so holy and so dear. But, clearly, Jew and Gentile must be able to meet at the same table. Where is the unity of the family, of the body, if they cannot eat together? Is not the love-feast, wherein all shall share a common meal, the very symbol of their identity in Christ Jesus with one another? There must be some way of sitting down together; there must be a common rule regulating food. And who can doubt what that common rule must be?

So the matter was argued out as soon as the critical moment was reached in Churches where the Christian body consisted of mixed elements. At Jerusalem, where practically the entire mass of believers were Jews, no question need arise. St. Paul himself at Jerusalem, among his own people, never dreamed of not keeping the ancient customs, which were dear to him as to them. He worshipped in the temple. He walked orderly, according to the rules. Jerusalem did not force the question. That is why the Jerusalem Apostles take so long to face its urgency.

But, at Antioch, the problem must be solved how Jew and Gentile could meet and eat together. And it was for that mixed situation

that the compromise of the first council was formed. The Church forbore to require circumcision; but it did demand of the Gentile section that it should conform so far to the Mosaic habits in matters of food as to make it tolerable for their Jewish brethren to sit at table with them without disgust. This is why the Gentiles are required to abstain from strangled meat, or meat with the blood in it. So far so good. Courtesy, expediency, justified this compromise in mixed Churches.

But, as St. Paul's work opened out, the problem widened. What of the Churches where there were practically no Jewish believers to consider? In Philippi, in Corinth, in Ephesus, the whole mass was Gentile. Were they to submit to the old rules? It was here that St. Paul became vehement. He would plead for courtesy, for kindness, for expediency, where these were the pleas. If certain ways of eating offend a brother, he would do anything rather than shock him. But if the rules were imposed as obligatory on Gentiles as such, then the first principles of the gospel seemed to him set at nought. For it would imply that a Gentile as such was unacceptable before God; that his ways of living and thinking were on a lower

plane than a Jew's ; that he could not, in his native Gentile character, in his native instincts, habits, manners, laws, pass into the Body of Christ ; but must qualify for it by dropping his nationality, and by Judaizing ; by robing himself in Jewish fashions, and adopting Jewish distinctions. This was to offend against the Cross. For it implied that the privilege of race still survived. These minute details of the Jewish law existed for the very purpose of keeping the Jews separate, as a people, from all the rest of mankind ; they were ordained in order to keep them continually conscious of his special and privileged isolation. This was vital to the situation before Christ came. But, in the flesh of Christ, rent on the Cross, all these racial distinctions had vanished away. Now the Gentile was as worthy to approach God as the Jew. And he was no longer to do it, as the prophet had foretold, by clinging on to the skirts of the Jew. He was to come near, in his own veritable person, moulded by his own history, possessed of his own laws ; not abandoning his Gentilism, but bringing it with him for transfiguration by the Spirit. There must be no slur cast upon him, no assignment of a lower seat. He was not to enter the covenant

as a proselyte of the gate, as an outer fringe, an appendage, copying as well as he could the higher manners of the spiritual aristocracy.

You see, the very heart of the mystery lay in this ; and it is our cause, my brethren, that St. Paul was fighting—yours and mine—to-day. For what he demands on our behalf, in warring for Gentile freedom, is that we should find our salvation, without ceasing to be Englishmen and Englishwomen ; without leaving our national character behind us at Baptism, or our national modes of social life such as we have fashioned for ourselves. We need not become Jews in order to be Christians.

That may look an obvious truism to us. We may wonder how any genuine believer in Jesus Christ could doubt it. But do we recall the apparent force of the argument on the other side ? Remember, these Jewish customs were not merely tribal, local, national, but had upon them the stamp of Divine approval. Could God have given them, without their being eternally right and good ; without their being the very best that could be devised ? And, then, for a final appeal, had not Jesus Christ Himself adopted, kept, sanctioned them ? He had lived as a Jew. He never touched unclean

food. He had walked according to all the customs of the Law. Was His example to go for nothing? Was He not our Pattern? Could we be wrong in doing simply as He did? Was it not the very instinct of faithful love, to order its life as He had ordered His own?

Ah! it may look easy now to say that meats and drinks were a light matter; but cannot we feel the force of arguments and appeals such as these? It is God's own commands that are to be disregarded. It is Christ's own example that is to be set aside. Perplexities, passions, wraths, might well shake the wisest and the best; and we cannot be much surprised if some there were who would bind themselves by a vow not to eat or drink until they had killed the man who advised such impieties, such sacrilege.

My brethren, it seemed, at the start, to us as if these disputes of the Acts were very remote from us of to-day. But, after all, they embody a lesson that Englishmen have to face more directly and widely than any other nation on the face of the earth; a lesson, too, which they have a peculiar difficulty in learning—the lesson of the equality of races. Always that question is before us. The Englishman goes

everywhere ; he plants himself down in the midst of every race ; whatever its colour, he rubs shoulders with them all. And he has excellent capacities for managing, controlling, ruling them.

But is there anybody who has greater difficulty than he in getting at their minds, in accepting their ideas ? His very gifts of government over them seem to depend on his simple and intense conviction of his own superior intelligence ; on his own belief in his English common sense ; on his unsuspicious self-reliance. He succeeds because he remains so utterly English—so totally unaffected by his environment. He carries England with him ; he is exactly the same abroad as he is at home. He rings himself about with English habits, English interests, English games. It does not matter where you come upon him, in India, Africa, China. He has his cricket, his polo, his hunting, his newspaper. All is English. A great strength there is in this sturdy independence ; 'just as there was, and is, an unconquerable strength in the Jew's unchanging hold on his national distinctions and habits. Only it lays the Englishman open to the same temptations as those to which the

Jew succumbed. Is he not set as a guide to the blind ; as a teacher of babes ? Does he not, like the Jew, assume that he must always know best what is good for these black people ? Are they not to him as children who cannot understand their own interests ? Does he not measure their advance by their willingness to adopt his ways, his habits of mind, his meats and drinks and dress ? Are not English ideas and English manners the standard of superiority ? Does he ever fancy for a moment that he, too, may have something to learn from them ? or can he ever induce himself to believe that these dark races, with their impenetrable faces, whom he manages so easily and so equitably, may have a natural development, a natural rational growth of their own, which is, to them, worth more than all the law and order which he brings to them so generously, and regards as so satisfactory ? Can he be induced to take them seriously ? Can he consider their native aspirations to be as real, as interesting, as sacred, as those which have made England free to go her own way, free to do what she will with her own life here at home ?

Surely we know well the answer. There is no

one who has a more sturdy contempt for all such matters ; no one who shuts himself up so entirely within the ring-fence of his national temper. And, therefore, St. Paul's message sleeps in an Englishman's ear ; St. Paul's challenge has still to be fought out. My brethren, we have not accepted what St. Paul risked his life at Jerusalem to declare, until we believe in the equal value of all races in Christ Jesus before God. Not their identity or equality of gifts ; these, of course, vary ; and some have a higher task, and some a lower ; and some are early in the field, and some are later. But their equal claim to their own natural modes of life ; to their own development ; to their own habits of expression ; to their own freedom of growth. This is what the Jew could not believe of the Gentile. This is what an Englishman cannot believe of races that are not of his own colour. Yet this is the mystery of Jesus.

And is it only men of another colour whom an Englishman mildly despises ? Does a white foreigner fare much better at his hands ? And especially, perhaps, in matters of religious custom. A foreigner's religion seems always to him a

poor and childish affair. There is no subject into which an Englishman more ruthlessly presses the rigid standard of his own home-habits. He moves about among even his own fellow-Christians abroad without a touch of brotherly sympathy. Their religious practices are, to him, only odd and silly and incomprehensible. He comes home and talks of Southern or Eastern Christians, and of what he saw them doing in their churches, exactly as if they were some curious heathen. It never seems to strike him that they in their way, and he in his, are both seeking pardon for their sins, and comfort in their pain, from the same Lord Jesus ; and that their way may have been quite as good, and real, and effectual for them as his own for him. He never seems to feel an impulse to kneel down by their side, and let his prayers mingle with theirs, in a common fellowship, as knit into one Body, as partakers of one Bread.

Dear people, the Acts has much to teach us yet, if it shows us how terribly a mere difference of race, or of national habit, can split into fragments the Catholic Church of Christ. And, coming one step nearer yet to

our own selves, is it abroad only that we have much to learn? How about whole classes of men, shut off one from another by divergence of customs and manners, and meats and drinks? So hard it is to believe, not only that we ought to be kind and charitable to those not of our class, but that their ways of thinking, their wants, desires, aspirations, likings, count for as much as ours, are equally real with ours and deserve equal consideration, and are quite as likely to be right. That is what we cannot believe; that is what it takes a positive effort on our part to allow. And it is that effort which Christ calls upon us, and enables us, to make. He endows all that is human with worth, with sanctity. He compels us to accept the vast variety of ways by which human nature may choose to express itself. He justifies us in our own, but forbids us to override, or to condemn, any different instincts equally natural in others. He will, in His grace, draw class to class according to the measure with which He inspires each class to give equal respect to the others; each to honour the other, not to patronize it; to learn from it quite as much as to instruct and improve it.

And it is the same with individuals of a different type from ourselves. How harsh, how intolerant, our judgments on character and on habits which happen to be the opposite of our own! The man of strong common sense cannot stand the man of imaginative emotion. The man of action despises thoroughly the man of thought. The man gifted with vigorous self-control has no mercy on that other, sensitive and unstrung, who is tossed hither and thither by gusty passion. "Why does he not do as I do?"—that is the relentless comment on it all. "I never make such an idiot of myself; why should he?" "I never find any difficulty in doing what he dreads and shrinks from." "I never have such sickly fancies, or such outlandish cravings." Exactly! You never have these; therefore you never can feel his difficulties, or measure his temptations; and therefore you cannot enter into his case, or give him sympathy. You are helplessly, cruelly, outside all his anguish. If only you would not judge everybody by yourself! If only you would try to believe in the value and in the reality of others utterly unlike yourself; of others whose ways seem to you contemptible and ridiculous!

If only you would say, "He is my brother; and that nature, that character of his, which is to me so unintelligible, so perverse, so unattractive, is dear to Jesus Christ, Who died for him—just as dear as my own! That man there, who offends my taste, who seems to be so vulgar, who breaks all the conventional decencies which make life run smoothly and pleasantly,—well, Jesus wears him on His heart; Jesus cares for him as for me! That commonplace person, who annoys me so by dulness, by stupidity, by irritating manners, is yet of the same Body: we are members one of another; for in Jesus Christ 'there is neither Jew nor Greek, Barbarian nor Scythian, bond nor free.' In Him there is no dull or clever, high or low, classes or masses. No distinction of persons. All are one thing in Christ Jesus."

Christ Jesus!—there is the only force which can overleap the barriers of our narrow conventions, our social prejudices, our personal dislikes. If only we would put this force to fuller use, how much happier this world might be! How much kinder and sweeter this great city of ours! We might even now do much to make it so, if only we, in this church to-day, were

resolved each to care for, to appreciate, at least one person whose character we instinctively dislike, whose manners naturally repel us, in the Name, in the grace of Jesus Christ, Who, though we could not be pleasing in His sight, yet loved us, and gave Himself for us.

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